

FOOL'S GOLD

by Erik Munsterhjelm

The Wind and the Caribou

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Fool's Gold

A NARRATIVE OF PROSPECTING
AND TRAPPING
IN NORTHERN CANADA

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CHAPTER I

SPRING had come to the wilderness. It was as if a giant fist, tightly closed all winter, had suddenly opened and poured liquid sunshine and warmth over the lakes and woods.

The sun thawed the frost of a bitter winter from the marrow of spruce and tamarack, the ground breathed again, and willows and aspens waved their tender buds in the chinook wind. Newborn waves rippled timidly on the shores of the little lake. The wasps were tidying their nest, butterflies flitted gaudily in the sunlight, beetles scurried about, and myriads of mosquitoes hovered over the land with the sustained hum of a plucked cello string.

An early pair of ducks quacked in a shallow bay, frogs let out tentative croaks like an orchestra tuning up, and boulders, freed by the sun, rumbled down the hills; the sound echoed like the beating of a great drum.

It was as warm as midsummer, but occasional icy gusts from the south brought reminders that the five- to six-foot thickness of ice on Lake Athabaska, half a mile away, was still unbroken.

Old Gus, followed by his black husky Prince, was walking slowly to the shore of the little lake. There he lay down, bent his head between two rocks and drank thirstily; he wiped his mouth and forehead on a tattered shirtsleeve and sat back on a boulder. Prince, panting under his heavy pack, flopped in the cool moss, his foam-specked tongue lolling redly.

For three days now Gus, gun in hand and a packsack on his back, had wandered through the country, hunting for beaver in the lakes that nestled in the valleys. Both he and Prince were tired. They would soon be home, though; this was the last lake they would visit, and from here it was only an hour's walk to the cabin, where a comfortable bed waited.

When Gus had lit his pipe, his sharp eyes scanned the water and shores for freshly peeled twigs, pieces of white birch-bark and recently cut cone-shaped tree-stumps, all signs of the presence of beaver in the lake. But there were none. No beaver here, he concluded, and stood up to resume his journey. Just then his eye was caught by the light-coloured scar from a fresh rockslide on the cliff across the lake. He stopped and looked at it in indecision. Then, acting on an impulse, he turned and walked wearily around the end of the lake.

Angular blocks of quartz and granite were piled up in a pyramidal talus at the foot of the cliff. Some were covered by black lichen and moss; others, freshly thrown down, were pink in the sun. With the heel of his axe Gus broke off a fragment, glanced at it and was about to throw it away when he started and looked again. Pyrite and chalco-pyrite gleamed like gold in the freshly broken quartz. He stuck the rock in his pocket and knocked loose more chips. All were mineralized, some looked even better than the first. Suddenly excited, Gus hammered more and more rocks to pieces, looked at them and pounded faster. Soon he was surrounded by scattered piles of rock-fragments. Unmindful now of beaver and the pitifully whining Prince, he turned them in his shaking fingers, intently searching for free gold among the sulphides. Tarnished pyrite made him catch his breath several times, but did not fool him for long. Then his excitement waned, and he rose with a disappointed sigh. Time to return home; no use digging around in that rock-pile any longer. There was no gold there.

Still—there might be some gold in the sulphides. People had after all found some gold in the area before, although in quantities too small to be of much value. But these rocks might contain more. Better take some samples and have them assayed. Crazier things could happen.

Gus stuck half a dozen of the richest-looking fragments in his pocket, shouldered his pack and turned homeward. As soon as he got the chance he would send them ‘outside’ for assay.

His opportunity came after spring break-up a few weeks later. Ed Knox, a prospector, who had worked in the area during the

past few seasons, stopped at Gus's cabin and said that he was going to Edmonton. 'And I'm not stopping there either, I'm going back to B.C., where there's gold I'm fed up with this country, it's the hungriest looking place I ever saw, there ain't a goddam thing here,' he said gloomily. 'I just stopped to say goodbye and see if there was anything I could do for you "outside". I'll be glad to oblige, Gus.'

'Sorry to see you go, Ed. Yes, I got some rocks here; could you take 'em out with you and have 'em tested for gold?' Gus dug his samples out of a box beside the door and added apologetically: 'I guess there's nothing in 'em, but they don't look too bad. They should be worth assaying anyway.'

'Sure, Gus, I'll take them. Let's see what you've got.' Knox dug out his mineral glass and looked at the samples with practised eye. 'Say, they don't look too bad at all. Could be gold in these all right. Where'd you find them?' Knox perked up visibly, his customary expression of gloom vanished. He examined the rocks closely from all sides, talked and asked questions. Gus, who by now was hopeful again, replied and explained. About the only thing he did not tell was where the samples originated.

Knox flattered and cajoled. But Gus, becoming suspicious, refused flatly to reveal the location of his find.

Ed Knox changed tactics; he proposed partnership. He pointed out that he was on his way to Edmonton, where he could get the samples assayed quickly and where he knew 'lots of important mining men' whom he could interest in the find, if it were good, and who would either buy it or lend money for development. He also maintained that it might take Gus, who had no 'connections in mining circles', years to interest 'the right people' in his find even if it were good. Besides, how would Gus know if it was good even if the assays were? Good assays did not necessarily mean a mine, a small though rich vein was worthless. It took an experienced mining man, like Ed Knox for instance, to know about these things. The best thing for Gus was to associate himself with somebody who knew all the ropes and who could find the right buyer and sell it for a fair price. Besides, there were many other difficulties connected with the staking and recording of claims,

assessment work and so on. What did Gus know about all these things? He would be taken to the cleaners by some unscrupulous claim-jumpers, unless he had somebody like Ed Knox to help him.

Gus, who really was totally ignorant of such technicalities, became anxious as he listened. Much of what Ed said made sense, he admitted. Ed was experienced and knew the ropes all right. If he handled all those technicalities and problems 'outside' he would do it right. And the chances were that he would sell the find quicker and for a price so much greater than Gus would dare ask, that Gus really might gain by the partnership. Besides, Ed was a nice soft-spoken fellow, who got along and could talk to people. After some consideration Gus agreed to a fifty-fifty partnership.

The details were soon ironed out. Ed was to go to Edmonton at once and have the samples assayed. If these were good he would return immediately to help Gus stake the find. Then he would return 'outside' again to sell it. The new-found partners shook hands on the deal and went to bed.

But the next morning Ed again was gloomy. Gus asked him what was the matter.

'Well, if you really want to know, Gus, I've been thinking things over. It seems to me that it would be no more'n fair if you showed me the find before I leave. After all, I'm putting a lot of money and time into this thing too without even knowing if you have anything at all. And I don't think it's the right way to treat a partner. If I see the find before I go, I can decide right away, when the assays come in, if it's worth bothering about, and if it is, get the right people interested at once without having to waste time and money on coming here to stake it first. Let the buyer stake it after we've made the deal and showed them the place. Then he can worry about all the technicalities and other problems. Don't you think that that would be the smartest way to work it, Gus?'

Gus considered. There was certainly something in what Ed said. It would speed up things a lot and make everything simpler too. But Gus still hesitated.

When he remained silent, Ed Knox said grumpily: 'I think it's a bit shabby of you not to rely on me. Why'd you go partners with

me if you don't trust me? There's no sense in a partnership where one don't trust the other. Might as well break it up then and be done with it. At least as far as I'm concerned.' Knox seemed more sad than angry.

Gus gave in. He took his new partner to the find. Knox was visibly impressed with it and said it looked 'real good', if only the assays held up.

He left the same afternoon. 'Keep your chin up, Gus. Let's hope we make a million,' he said as Gus saw him off and gave him five dollars for a mining licence, which was needed for staking claims.

When the boat had disappeared beyond the point Gus returned happily to his cabin. Things were looking up. Ed had liked the showing and he would soon sell it if the assays panned out. Gus was lucky to find an experienced partner who knew what to do.

The weeks that followed passed with exasperating slowness as Gus waited impatiently for Ed Knox's return or some message. But while he worked he whistled. And any visitor who chanced by was shown samples and told of the find and about how Ed and Gus would make a million.

A month passed, but Gus's faith remained unshaken. It would not be long now, Ed would be back soon. Things took time.

Gus, a spare, tough and prematurely grey man in his early fifties, had arrived in Canada at the age of twenty. To begin with he made his living by cutting pulp and cord-wood in Ontario lumber camps, harvesting wheat on the prairies and salmon-fishing in British Columbia. Following his discharge from the army after the First World War, he travelled North with a fish-company and, liking the country, settled there. Since that time he had been living as a fisherman and trapper in the unspoiled wilderness along the north shore of Lake Athabasca. And like most other people of the region he prospected a little in his spare time.

Gus was a typical northerner. He loved passionately his free and untrammeled life and the wilds that surrounded him, even though his neighbours lived miles away and the hardships were many. The peace and simplicity of his existence compensated for its lack of comfort.

The area surrounding Gus's cabin was rich in game and fur-bearers; the lake abounded with fish; and during the years he had trapped there he had taxed the grounds with moderation, giving game a chance to increase and thus securing for himself a continuing supply of valuable pelts. In fifteen years Gus had gone 'outside' only a couple of times, and he had come to regard the territory surrounding his home as a private kingdom. As was the custom of the North, other trappers respected his claim to it and hunted elsewhere.

Gus was well liked by everybody along the lake for his unassuming manner and his quiet courage. The tales of his coolness and presence of mind in difficult situations were many. He was especially known for his lack of fear of water. Rapids and the tricky shoal-filled channels of the north shore held no terrors for him even during the worst storms.

But although Gus was happy, he could still dream rosily of untold wealth and a life of luxurious ease. During the month following Ed Knox's departure he went around in a hopeful daze.

Then, when no word came from Knox, the dream faded. The samples must have proved worthless or Ed would have returned long ago. True, he had promised to write, but in his disappointment he had probably forgotten. Gus had been a fool to pin so much hope on his find. How many of the others made along the lake-shore had ever panned out? It was better to forget the whole thing. There would be no riches for him.

One morning some six weeks after Knox's departure, when Gus had returned from lifting his nets and was cleaning a trout for his dinner, he heard a faint far-away hum. He stiffened and listened. It came again, plainer, louder. The sound of an airplane: there was no doubt about it now. The roar grew stronger by the second. It was a plane all right, and it was coming straight for Beaverlodge. Eagerly, Gus stood up and shaded his eyes, looking for it. There it was, a large yellow transport craft, its wings flashing in the sun. Almost overhead it made a wide graceful bank and went down for a landing just beyond the first point to the west—right near the find!

Gus threw his cap on the ground, jumped on it and straight up

in the air and shouted from joy. Ed was back. The assays had been good. They had a mine! Just now he was probably taking those big-shots he had talked about to the find, and then they would come over to the cabin and Ed would tell Gus all about it before they closed the deal. Maybe they would make a million! He would soon know now. But by gosh, those fellows would all be hungry after their long trip. Better clean a couple more trout; those city folks usually liked fried fresh fish and lots of it. Quickly and expertly he dressed and filleted two nice fat ones and hurried into the cabin to peel some potatoes.

When he had put his pots on the stove and made the fish ready for frying, he returned to the dock and sat down to wait. It was a long wait. The mining men were obviously giving the find a thorough going over. Gus worried briefly over the food; it might spoil if they did not show up soon. Oh well, he could always cook more.

The morning passed but nobody appeared, neither Ed nor the big-shots with him. Gus still waited patiently. Then at noon, when they still had not shown up, he could no longer contain himself. Suddenly, in a rush, he jumped into his boat, started the motor and drove at full speed toward the point. As soon as he rounded it he saw the yellow plane at the shore. He cut his engine and came up beside it.

Already, while he made fast, he heard the sound of shouting and chopping from the bush near-by. He hurried toward it. A couple of strangers were cutting a blaze-line with the aid of a compass. Gus hailed them:

'Hi there, fellows! Is Ed Knox around?'

'Oh, hello there. Sure, Ed's here. He's with Johnson. Over there, about quarter a mile away. But you can't miss them. You'll hear them chopping long before you get there.'

Gus hurried off. Chopping! That meant that they were staking. Ed and he really did have a mine! Almost too good to be true, but there it was.

Soon he heard the sound of cutting and headed that way. He came on three more men. Two were hewing out corner posts for claims under the direction of the third. But none of them was Ed.

'Hello, fellows! Is Ed Knox around?' Gus asked for the second time.

The man who apparently was the boss looked at Gus. 'Hello there yourself. No, Ed's not here now. He left with Bob Hollet maybe ten minutes ago. I guess they went back to the plane. Bob was going to leave pretty soon. What do you want with Ed?'

'I'm his partner and I want to find out what kind of a deal we've made. I guess we've got a mine all right, since you fellows are staking,' Gus said happily. 'But since Ed isn't here, maybe you can tell me something about the deal?'

'Ed's partner. Oh, no! I can't tell you anything about that, I'm afraid. Ed did all his business with Bob Hollet. I just came along to stake the ground. I never heard Ed speak about his partner, but then they never tell me much about their deals. By the way, my name's Johnson. What's yours?'

Gus told him and shook hands, and added, somewhat puzzled: 'Maybe he didn't tell you about me, but I'm his partner all right. I was the one who found this stuff in the first place. I live just behind the point in the bay over there about a mile away,' Gus explained and pointed.

Johnson looked at him levelly. 'Well, as I said, I don't know anything about those things. You'd better see Ed and Bob about it, before Bob leaves. He was going to fly back to Edmonton today.'

Without further words Gus turned and hurried back toward the shore. Then he heard the roar of the plane and started running. But he was too late. When he reached the shore the plane had taken off.

The two men he had seen earlier stood on the shore. They had apparently given the pilot a hand with the plane before he left. Gus turned to them:

'Is Ed Knox on that plane?'

'No. Only Bob Hollet. He's going back to Edmonton. I haven't seen Ed since this morning.'

Puzzled, and with growing uneasiness, Gus continued his search for Ed Knox. He met several other men in the bush, but not Knox. Nobody had seen him since shortly before Gus's arrival. Finally

Gus went to have another talk with Johnson. He was following their blaze-line when he saw the foreman and his two companions resting on a fallen log. Their backs were toward him. Johnson was talking:

' . . . never did like the looks of that Knox anyway. There's something fishy about him. He's too smooth and nice altogether. I wouldn't put it past him to rob his own grandmother of her last nickel. I'd sure hate to tell that fellow, who claims he's Ed's partner—but I think he's been took!'

Gus stopped cold in his tracks. It was no use stalling any longer. He'd better face it—he'd already realized it anyway—'he'd been took'.

Without revealing his presence, he turned quietly and returned to the boat. Then in a cold, trembling rage he went home and got his rifle. And all the rest of that day he silently roamed the bush where the men were still staking, never showing himself, but listening and looking. He was asking no more questions. When he caught up with Knox, he would settle that partnership business in his own way. But he never caught a glimpse of Knox. He was gone as if swallowed up by the ground that he had stolen.

That night, when Gus on a hunch hurried over to Knox's cabin, a few miles away, he found the man's skiff and outboard motor missing. The whole thing was now clear. That morning, when Knox had heard the sound of Gus's approaching boat, he had stolen away through the bush to his own cabin and fled. By now he was miles away, and where he had gone was anybody's guess.

Bitter and frustrated, Gus returned home. The man whom he had taken for his partner and trusted had not been satisfied with half the find; he had stolen the whole thing. All Gus received was the compassion of the staking crew, and that was like salt in an open wound, a constant reminder of his partner's faithlessness.

Rumours of the find soon spread and resulted in a rush in the best Klondyke tradition. Within a few days the first gold-seekers arrived, hardy trappers and fishermen from nearby camps. Half-breeds and moccasined Indians joined in, and a few prospectors from distant fields. The trickle grew to a swelling flood as pale office-clerks, apple-cheeked farm boys and businessmen from the

outside started arriving by boat and by plane; everybody hurried to take part in the division of the loot.

Day and night eager stakers criss-crossed the bush, put up corner posts, blazed lines and pounded rocks in the hills. Tents rose like mushrooms on the shores of the lakes around Beaverlodge. Drilling, blasting, shouting and the clatter of engines became an almost continuous sound in the once peaceful forests.

The competition became knife-sharp. Some worked until they dropped in their tracks to stake desirable locations before others got them. Often several parties staked the same ground simultaneously and settled their disputes amicably or with fists and boots. Gold-fever gripped everybody and all sense of fair play disappeared. People resorted to fighting, bluffing, blanketing, theft and all sorts of other chicanery to gain their ends. Claim-posts were pulled up and replaced by others; false names and licence numbers were inscribed on posts to get a man more ground than available licences gave him the right to. False rumours about new finds in other areas were started deliberately to distract the attention of would-be stakers from wanted ground, and staking dates were falsified.

It was late fall, and snow covered the ground before the rush began to abate. By then the territory for miles around Beaverlodge had been staked.

At first Gus regarded the whole business with mixed amazement and scorn. Then he too caught the fever once more. As fast as his boat could take him, he travelled to Fort Chipewyan for a miner's licence. But there he was told that he could not have one; someone had already bought one for him. Then he remembered that he had given Ed Knox money to buy a licence with before he left for Edmonton. Knox had obviously bought it, but had neglected to send it. With yet an additional reason to hate Knox, Gus returned to Beaverlodge, where in enforced idleness he had to watch all the good ground around him being staked by outsiders.

Although the crowd of stakers was made up of adventurers of every description, it is to their credit that they showed some consideration for the unlucky man. The ground immediately surrounding his cabin became by common consent taboo. When at

last, late in the fall, Gus received his licence from Knox by mail, he was able to stake three claims.

In other respects, too, Gus became the recipient of the gold-hunters' good-will. His cabin was the focus of the little camp which was springing up, and it became the custom for every new arrival to visit Gus and to hear the story of his find and betrayal from his own lips. They offered comfort too, often in liquid form. For Gus this was fine: it was easier to forget that way. More and more he was content to sit in his cabin and brood. By fall he hardly even bothered to visit his fish-nets.

By then his hunting grounds were spoiled. The moose and caribou had been shot or driven off and the fur-bearers had moved to quieter regions, undisturbed by chopping, blasting and the clatter of engines. Newcomers' nets littered the fishing grounds.

Unable to make a living, he was hard pressed even to feed his dogs. So he killed or sold them all except Prince, left his traps to rust in the warehouse, his nets to rot in the rain, and remained idle in his cabin, increasingly willing to accept the comfort of the bottle.

In an effort to help him, people persuaded the government to appoint him postmaster of the new camp, but Gus could not handle the job and soon lost it. The company that had bought his find from Knox and later learned the truth tried to assist him, but Gus declined their offer because they had dealt with Knox. They then devised another way. A local storekeeper was induced to 'stake' Gus with food and supplies for a certain sum each month, ostensibly as credit 'on future finds'.

And so the once self-reliant trapper remained in Beaverlodge, a broken man dependent on charity. Adversity had been too great for him; he lacked the strength to rise and start afresh in a new place.

Such is the story of Old Gus, the little immigrant trapper, who found great riches and lost them again and with them also his own quiet kingdom in the land of countless lakes and endless forests.

But his discovery started a new epoch in that part of the North which surrounds Lake Athabaska and Great Slave Lake. It was the first important mineral discovery there. Other and richer finds

followed and gave impetus to the development of the whole area.

Until then mail had arrived in the scattered trading posts only a few times a year and supplies only during the short summer by slow river boats. The first air-transport companies had struggled hard and managed to survive mostly on the mail-routes along the most important waterways.

All this changed in a few years. Soon fast diesel-powered tugs hauled barges along rivers and lakes, and freight and passengers increased on the air-routes, until one could go to almost any part of the wilderness easily and at reasonable cost. To many forts and trading-posts mail now came weekly, and he who had the means and the desire could go to some 'outside' city for the weekend.

The face of the North has changed profoundly. Today there are no stranded backwoods people in its scattered but modern communities. Even the natives are swept along on the tide of progress.

Although the mine he found is dead and the community he founded is, like himself, almost forgotten, much of the credit for all this goes to Gus. But he was swept away and lost in the flood that he began.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Gus had made and lost his 'find', I was in the Stony Rapids area, over one hundred miles away. Stony Rapids, a little trading post at the east end of Lake Athabaska, had a population of less than a hundred and was entirely dependent on trapping for a living. It lay more than four hundred miles from the nearest railway, received mail four times a year and was for months completely cut off from the outside world. So when in August I left for my trapping grounds further east, no news of the gold-strike at Beaverlodge had yet penetrated to this remote and peaceful corner.

When I came to the fort for Christmas to sell furs and buy supplies there were some vague rumours about it, but nobody paid much attention to them. It was just another of those 'finds' which almost every summer were made somewhere in the district and which so far had invariably proved worthless. The inhabitants of Stony Rapids, who at this time of the year had more pleasant and important things on their minds, repeated the rumours only as another bit of gossip, which they fondly expected to be able to laugh at later.

But about one month later my neighbour, who had been to the fort, stopped at my cabin on Black River and brought startling news. The gold-strike at Beaverlodge was not only real, but sensationaly rich. A terrific rush had taken place, and several mining companies who had acquired ground there were working it feverishly; airplanes came and went, more people arrived daily, and big wages were being paid. The Mounted Police who had stopped there on their return from a routine patrol had brought this sensational news to Stony.

I listened avidly to every scrap of my neighbour's story, and

when he left my peace of mind went with him. I just could not get the gold out of my mind. I thought of it continuously, dreaming of finding rich mines and large nuggets. I walked around in a daze, and trapping, which was becoming increasingly poor as spring approached, had suddenly lost all its attraction. I was still wondering whether I should chuck it or not when my problem was solved for me. A sudden chinook, with rain, warmth and sunshine, followed by freezing, came along and put all my traps out of order. That decided me. It would take at least ten days to get the traps in working order again and by then most of the foxes' fur would be rubbed, the mink springy and the wolves gone. There would be little more to trap that year because the beaver-season would soon be closed too. I would quit the trapping and go to Beaverlodge.

In a flurry I drove my dog-team over my line and picked up the traps. Then I packed my most valued possessions on my toboggan and mushed in to Stony Rapids. After leaving most of my equipment there and listening to a few more rumours I continued westward as if chased by evil spirits.

In Fond-du-Lac, fifty miles on and my next stop, the news of Beaverlodge was, if anything, still more exciting. They had not known the half of it in Stony. I became even more keyed up. I had to get to Beaverlodge quickly before others got all the gold. I must rush on.

But now I ran into a snag. Nobody had a map of Beaverlodge. Like Paradise its exact location seemed to be vague. Even though people knew the place well they could not describe the route there. The best advice I could get was this: 'It isn't hard to find, just follow the north shore till you come to a mountain which looks like a beaverhouse. Gus's cabin's at the foot of it in a deep bay. Just keep going till you see the mountain, you can't miss it! It's about fifty miles.'

And with these directives I had to be content when I started out again next morning. Leaning into the bitter wind, looking toward the skyline for a hill which resembled a beaverhouse, whilst dreaming of nuggets as big as my fist, I struggled westward on the lake.

Keeping away from islands and points far out on the ice, where the wind-packed drifts were like large frozen waves and so hard that only the marks of the dogs' claws and the twin trails of my sleigh-runners showed, we bounced briskly on. The wind stung my nose and cheeks and cut right through my parka; the cold nipped fingers and toes. The seemingly endless ice-field undulated like a newly laundered bedsheet in the blinding light. Squinting against the sun I saw only the sharply blue shore to the right stretch out and disappear beyond the horizon ahead. The lake was endless, the ice without bounds. In spite of the cold I breathed deeply, enjoying the clear air, the peace and the wide horizons. I felt free and without care.

But one also became insignificant and lost out there. Though the dogs trotted on briskly, the sleigh hardly seemed to move and the landscape remained the same. When I camped for the night on an island far out, I seemed to have come only a couple of miles from Fond-du-Lac. And I had not seen another living soul all day.

The next day was almost the same. The wind had died, but the sun shone as brightly and the ice was as dazzling as before. Now I looked eagerly for that mountain which looked like a beaverhouse, but although the shore became more rugged as we travelled on I discovered no hill of the right shape. When dusk came, and I had to camp for the night, I still had not seen anything like the hill I was seeking.

Now came the doubt. I sat far into the night by my camp-fire and debated with myself. What a precious idiot I was to start out on a two-hundred-mile lake, looking for a hill like a beaverhouse; especially as it was not likely that I would see a single person who could direct me. Maybe I had already passed it without recognizing it; all hills look like beaverhouses from some direction. I could wander around out there for a month without ever finding Beaverlodge.

The smoke of the fire rose straight up in the arctic air like a twisted Moorish pillar, the stars shone bright and large as silver dollars, the dogs lay curled into frosted balls of darning wool, snoozing with their noses under their tails and occasionally

opening a green, shining eye to see if master was not going to bed. Dejected, I finally crawled into my feather-robe and fell asleep.

My depression was gone in the morning. It was impossible to remain downhearted when the sun shone brightly, and the air was so fresh. With renewed enthusiasm I hitched up my team and rode on. I had hardly started when I came on the first signs of other people; the faint marks of snow shoes on the hard drifts. These were factory-made snow shoes, I observed; that meant the tracks were made by white men and probably by men from the 'outside'. All local men used shoes made either by themselves or bought from the Indians. My goal must be near, I thought as I drove on.

Soon I saw a freshly hewed claim-post on the point of an island. It had some writing on it; it was the number one post for mineral claim Jim number 16, and had been erected two weeks before. And when I rounded the next point, there ahead of me, several miles away beyond a wide bay, rose a hill, the highest I had seen so far and with the right shape. It actually did resemble a beaver-house. It must be Beaverlodge mountain. I continued with eyes and ears alert.

After a few more miles a bay opened up, and driving into it the signs that I had looked for began to appear. First there were tracks of dog-teams and men, then I saw rows of small spruce on the ice, and then the widely spaced tracks of airplane skis became more and more numerous. And near the shore of a little cove several fat yellow pillars of smoke rose slowly out of the spruce bush. Seeing the smoke the dogs broke into a gallop, and quickly took me into the bay where most of the tracks led.

On the ice beside some gas and oil drums rested a plank, and on the shore nearby, partly obscured by tall dark spruce, four large white tents were pitched neatly in a row. Thick smoke welled from their fat stove pipes. I had evidently found Beaverlodge.

My team and I were quickly surrounded by a handful of men. They inspected us curiously, some a bit timorously, before speaking their greetings. And then, as the bitter cold made them rub their noses and ears, they invited me to the kitchen tent. There I

was ccremoniously introduced to the cook, a round bobbing man, dressed even here in the wilds in a spotless apron and high white chef's cap. He was obviously a person of consequence; the manner of the crew bespoke that.

While I, cold and hungry, devoured all the cake in sight and several cups of hot coffee to boot, I also inspected the cook's tent. It was set up on a frame of peeled spruce logs and had a lumber floor. A large canvas fly covered it like a second roof. The whole of one side was occupied by the large dining table and a couple of benches, the other by shelves loaded with provisions, pots and pans, a huge cook-stove and the chef's bed. Several kettles, from which appetizing odours were wafted to my nose, simmered on the stove and on the floor beside it a cat lay peacefully sleeping. I had not seen one and had never expected to see one so far North.

Seated, I settled back and rolled a cigarette. The cook and crew—so far held in check by northern rules of hospitality—now started plying me with questions. Suddenly they wanted to know all about me, who and what I was, where I came from, and why and where I was going and how. It appeared that they had only recently arrived here and that I was the first 'native' they had met. When they found out that I was a trapper they wanted to know if I had any skins of silver or cross fox to sell. It was the cook who finally rescued me from my inquisitors.

'Look, fellows, what about giving Erik a chance to catch his breath?' Turning to me, he said apologetically: 'Jack and Ed have never seen a trapper before, this is their first trip North.'

It was my turn to ask questions. About the gold find, about Beaverlodge and what was going on there.

In about five minutes I gathered ten times more information about Beaverlodge and also received a truer idea of the place than I had hitherto.

At once I found that the picture I had until then had been grossly exaggerated, even in part untrue. The find itself was very promising and the activity had been great in the field the fall before, but now everything was practically at a standstill. No crowds of men and no life such as I had been told about existed. Beside the camp

where I was, which belonged to the Consolidated Mining & Smelting Company of Canada Ltd., and which was diamond drilling the original find, only two or three lesser outfits were then active in the field. Shortages of food and other supplies kept others out so far, but with the coming of spring, renewed and increased activity was expected.

The crew in the C.M. & S. camp consisted of diamond drillers and their helpers, a diamond setter, a crew of carpenters who were erecting a permanent camp and their foreman, the cook and bull cook, and the mining engineer in charge of the whole operation.

So far the results of the drilling had been 'promising' and the general opinion was that they had a 'real big thing'. One other company was reported to have 'something good' also, but nothing much was known about the properties of the numerous other outfits, large and small, that had acquired ground in the area. The work on these was still in the preliminary stage. But hopes were high, and several groups of claims nearby had been sold for sizeable fortunes. With break-up would come a renewal of the rush. While the men talked, they passed around samples of gold ore, some with visible specks of free gold.

While I handled these with awed respect I confided that I had come to Beaverlodge to find my own gold mine. The cook said at once: 'No use right now, Erik. You can't find anything with all this snow on the ground. Why don't you stay right here, and work for a while until the snow melts? I think Percy needs a man with a dog-team to haul logs for him. Why don't you go and talk to him? He's in the next tent.'

The other men agreed, and after some consideration I saw that they were right. A little chastened, I followed their advice, and ten minutes later I was hired to haul logs for the new buildings. The wage was eight dollars a day and all found plus free transportation for the dog feed, which had to come by plane from Fort McMurray, two hundred miles away. I was to start the next day.

The deal concluded, I made myself at home in the camp. The tents were equipped with bunks, tables and benches of lumber. In the centre of each tent stood a huge heater—usually red-hot at that

time of the year—from which a stove pipe snaked its way out through the front of the tent. In these stoves a fire burned day and night and it was the bull cook's job to see that it never went out. All the material for the camp—except the logs, of course—had been flown in.

Percy and the diamond setter lived together in a small tent with the drillers and their helpers in the next. The cookery was next door and the rest of the crew shared the fourth tent. Besides these there were numerous core shacks, caches and supply tents in the camp.

The quartz vein from which Old Gus had knocked his first gold samples was only a little way off, and that same afternoon I visited it. A trail, tramped by other reverent pilgrims who had been there ahead of me, led right up to the spot. I clambered to the top of the talus of loose rocks at the foot of the cliff and loosened a few chips. When I looked at the goldbearing crystals of chalco and iron pyrites I felt like Hearne or MacKenzie, or a Mohammedan pilgrim at the stone of Chaba.

It was already dusk when I returned to camp, and the crew was back from work. The supper bell rang, the table was set—and what a meal! I observed then, as so many times since, that better food than that served in mining camps is to be found only in good restaurants. Most of the victuals on this table were of a kind that a trapper would see only during those short months in the summer that he spent in a trading centre. He just could not think of transporting such bulky luxuries out to his trapping camps. There were fresh fruits and vegetables of several kinds, fresh beef, pork and eggs, pies, cookies and cakes. The men took all this for granted, and some even complained of the lack of variety, although every ounce had been flown in two hundred miles at great cost, and many of them had certainly not been used to any such fare during the last hungry years on the home farm.

The men were a motley crowd. The nucleus of the crew consisted of diamond drillers. They are a breed all their own and a clannish lot: hard-drinking, hard-working and hard-bitten fellows. They can be outstandingly honest and reliable, or equally crooked and troublesome, but they are seldom merely moderate

in anything. Canadian drillers are considered among the foremost of their kind, and are sought after all over the world. In one respect they are like women, mining men can neither get along with them nor without them, and have to put up with their foibles. But whatever their failings or whatever one's personal feelings about them may be, they are a tough and vigorous lot.

Of those in our camp some had been in South Africa and South America, others in Australia and even China; they had often worked among people who understood no English and had to be guided with gestures. One man's face carried the scars of small-pox, another still had occasional attacks of malaria.

The drillers in this camp were, if anything, better behaved than the average. I did not know it then, but later experience taught me that they were angels compared to some.

The other members of the crew were of an entirely different type. Most of them were fresh from the farm and had arrived only a few weeks before. They were strangers and greenhorns in the North, and wanted apparently to remain so. Since their arrival they had not seen anything of the land surrounding the camp nor showed any desire to learn about it.

Their interests lay elsewhere. They spoke of their homes, of their wives or sweethearts or their children's whooping cough, the unemployment in their home-town, the payments on their new living-room suite, their friends outside, the wheat crop and the possibility of buying a new car—in fact of any and every subject except the land and the people around them. They had brought with them their own little world, a small bit of the home-farm or prairie town, their own little corner with all its gossip, partisanship and local patriotism. The wide free land around them was of no interest; it hardly existed. It even seemed as though they were a bit afraid of this land and wanted to forget its existence. When it was mentioned, they asked a preoccupied question or two, and hardly listened to the answers before hurrying back to their own little prairie world and its petty problems.

Even their attitude to money was a different and meaner one than I had been accustomed to in the North. When I listened to these men I felt like a fish out of water; it was as if I had suddenly

been confined in a small hot room with musty air. This was indeed another breed of men than the open-handed, self-reliant and helpful men of the North that I had known hitherto. In this company I was definitely out of place.

They probably also regarded me as of a different breed, because they treated me with a certain deference, almost with timidity, as if they feared that I would suddenly turn and bite or stick a knife into them. They seemed to feel that anybody who could live in this wild and dangerous land must needs be a bit wild and dangerous himself.

They were not my kind and I did not feel at home with them, and since the tent where I was to sleep was a little crowded, I welcomed the chance to pitch my own a little way from the others. When the air in the bunk-tent got too thick I could retreat. Still, these men were a decent enough lot and good workers.

The next morning we started to work. But when I saw the huge logs which my dogs were expected to haul I became dubious; some of them measured forty feet in length and twenty inches in thickness. When it took three men to lift only the butt end on to the sleigh I almost lost hope, and I saw the others regard my five dogs with plain doubt. I felt the same way, but tried not to show it as I yelled 'Mush!' as though my dogs had done nothing but haul one-ton timbers every day. When the team walked away with their huge load without any trouble I felt intense relief and pleasure and an enormous respect for the strength of my five pooches. They did not weigh three hundred pounds all together, but they pulled five to seven times their own weight as if it were nothing. Soon the first log has been delivered at the new building site, and the others followed one by one. As the trail became hard-packed the pulling of course became easier.

The new camp-site lay a mile distant. Several large buildings were to be erected. From morning until night I loaded timbers on my double sleigh and unloaded them again at the building site. The dogs pulled and strained until they lay like leather thongs along the snow. The piles of logs grew and the building increased in height, layer by layer. Balancing on the half-finished walls the

carpenters swung their broad-axes; perspiration made their sun-burned faces shine like carrots in the spring sun, and the smell of spruce gum hung pleasantly in the surrounding air.

From the size of the planned camp it was obvious that the company expected great things from their prospect. This was shown also by the great number of dignitaries that arrived there for inspection toward spring, when the weather became warmer. It was in connection with one of these visits that an incident occurred in which I unwittingly played an important though unflattering role which earned me a name which I would have preferred to be without.

Two of my dogs, Jack and Chocolate, had suddenly for some unknown reason started to hate each other. At every chance they growled and fought, even in harness. Time and again they got the whole team into it and tangled up the harnesses into an unholy mess. This delayed the work and frayed my patience so that I lashed out with both whip and tongue. One calm and sunny day I was hauling logs from a bluff where I had to turn my sleigh on the spot so that the dogs had to walk right past each other. And each time Chocolate passed Jack they flew at each other's throats, bit and tugged at each other's ears until hair and skin flew and the traces became tangled into Gordian knots. Finally my patience broke completely. In a rage I threw myself at the culprits, resolved to stop the fighting once and for all. While I belaboured them thoroughly with the whip, I also abused them with all the curses I could lay my tongue on. It was a kill-or-cure treatment, and, quite exhausted, I had to sit down for a rest when I had finished; but it worked. After that the two rowdies did not dare even to show their teeth when they looked at each other.

When I came home after work that night I was greeted only by sunny smiles and wide grins. Percy invited me to sit down beside him at the table. A little surprised at this sudden popularity, and suspicious, I accepted the invitation. By and by I got the explanation for all this unnatural friendliness.

It seems that some company dignitaries had arrived at the camp that morning. After an inspection and a substantial lunch they were returning to the waiting plane and enjoying the sunny and calm

day. Suddenly the peace and quietness of the afternoon was broken by barking and a horrible growl, followed by a string of unprintable curses and the shrill yammering of dogs. The cursing and yelling continued, interspersed with the cracks of a whip for quite some time. The cavalcade of directors stopped in amazed wonder. Then one of them raised his hand for silence and listened with obvious admiration to the stream of abuse from the bush. When it ended, and the silence was broken only by the occasional low whimpering of a dog, he shook his head and smiled: 'That was the most beautiful cussing I've heard for a long time.'

And that, Percy assured me, was praise to be proud of, because the director in question had spent many years in the company of muleskinners in the mountains in the early days. And he was reported to be quite handy with oaths himself. 'But you had him beat a mile and green with jealousy,' Percy said.

Forthwith I was elected 'the cussing and dog-driving champion of the North'. Even several years after, some misguided individual would address me as 'Champ'.

I hope that the reader does not get the impression that I was beating my dogs all the time. To be sure, they—like children—needed occasional chastisement to keep them obedient and well-behaved, but that was the exception. As a rule, dogs obey without hesitation if they love and respect their master. And that spring my dogs certainly earned their board and keep. They worked like galley-slaves.

If their work was hard their appetite also was enormous. Every night I boiled a five-gallon tin full of oatmeal to which I added two pounds of tallow and all the scraps I got from the cook. When this concoction had cooled it was poured in the snow before the dogs, who gulped it down in no time. But even this huge meal was not always enough. Jack, my big grey husky, was especially hungry and looked at me entreatingly every time I came near the spot where he was tied. A ration of three average whitefish disappeared in his gullet like magic. One fish was just three gulps. With one bite almost half of it disappeared; after a second convulsive swallow only a piece protruded from his jaws, and even while he greedily finished this his eyes were already

covetously fixed on the next fish. Though Jack usually got a little more food than the other dogs he was always the first to finish his meal and to try to steal from his team mates.

The cook had managed to buy four nice lake trout and four whitefish for a welcome change in our monotonous meat diet. To keep them fresh until needed he had placed them in a cardboard box just outside the cookhouse door.

One morning when I was going for breakfast, the peace of the morning was shattered by shouts and damnations from the direction of the kitchen. I hurried my steps and soon saw the cook standing outside and telling the grinning crew that that so-and-so Erik's so-and-so goddamned dog had stolen all his beautiful fish.

The truth of this was not to be denied, because, enthroned on the garbage dump, lay Jack. He was swollen like a balloon, his tongue lolled out a foot, and his slanting wolf's eyes squinted blissfully. He did not even bother to move when I approached, he just panted and groaned from sheer well-being, and emanated unpleasant smells. And all around him the garbage dump looked as if a tornado had struck it. It had been completely turned over and every little edible morsel extracted. It gaped like a black crater against the white snow. For once Jack had had a real square meal.

All the fine fish went first, and after this little appetizer he had gone to work in earnest. It had taken him all night but he had gone through the garbage dump thoroughly.

I grabbed the howling culprit by the scruff of his neck and led him away and tied him up again. Without mercy I made him work all day. He was forced to struggle in the harness, although his stomach hung only an inch or so from the snow, and all the good things he had eaten kept coming out from both ends. And every so often, when I remembered that half of the day's wages would go to paying for the fish he had stolen, he got an extra crack on the rump with the whip. But it was no fun driving him, because of the horrible stench that surrounded him.

Eventually, the logs had all been moved and spring was approaching. The sun became warmer and the snow began to melt on the south slopes of the hills. Soon it all would be gone. It

was time to start looking for that gold mine. And so I left the camp and moved to the little tent-town near Old Gus's cabin. There I would be able to gather the information I needed on where there was good open prospecting ground and where the best finds had been made, and the thousand other things I needed to know before starting out on my great quest.

CHAPTER III

Gus's cabin stood in a little clearing at the shore of a bay almost in the shadow of Beaverlodge Hill. The bay was cross-shaped and well sheltered, provided a good landingstrip for planes, and was deep enough for all the boats that plied the lake. Thus the little cabin became from the beginning the centre of the community which was growing up on the clearing and on the shores adjoining it.

Planes landed here almost daily with mail and passengers, and the dog-teams of Gus's friends stopped often by his door. There was a hustle and bustle, and the cabin was usually crowded with men who smoked and talked and cooked until the air could be cut with a knife. But Gus did not mind; he was hospitality itself. He thought it natural that whoever was in the neighbourhood should stay with him, and extended his welcome to everyone. Although some nights the floor was so full that he had difficulty in reaching the door without stepping on sleeping men, he never complained.

His cabin had become a meeting-place, a club of sorts, for all the prospectors in the district. There one talked about finds or rocks in general, or waited for mail, or just passed the time of the day.

Gus received me with his usual friendliness and would not hear of me pitching my tent, but invited me to share the floor with the half a dozen or so other men who already lived there. Here in their company I was suddenly in a different world from the one I had just left, a bigger and freer world, that contrasted sharply with the little corner of the prairie in the bunkhouse. Here I was more at home.

All the flotsam and jetsam that had taken part in the rush the

fall before had been forced to leave with the coming of the winter. Only the prospectors and woodsmen had remained, self-reliant men of the trail and the stream, who liked their hard life, perhaps not so much for its economic possibilities as for the prospecting itself, and for the thrills that the participation in the various rushes to the far corners of the continent gave them. Many were as much at home in the jungles of South America as in the bush of the northland or in the streets of Toronto or New York.

Among them were men who had searched for gold a lifetime without success, and others who had made fortunes and spent them. There were men who represented big companies, and sour-doughs with just enough money to see them through break-up. One man could have lived on easy street all his life if he had so chosen and another had come in his private plane. But in spite of all these differences, they had something in common; the same weather-beaten, lined features, the same open but penetrating gaze, and the same conception of ethics and fair play—and a feeling of common brotherhood, a stamp of sorts, the mark of the North. They were real prospectors; among them one was in the company of men.

Some of them were staking ground indiscriminately, relying on its proximity to established finds or on the rock formations. But the majority waited for the snow to melt before staking or resuming their work on some property.

Everybody was helpful and ready to give information about the district and its geology, about what parts were already staked and what parts of the remainder were worth prospecting. In a few days I got as good a picture of the whole area as one could without working in the field itself. There were one or two who really went out of their way to help a newcomer.

There I also heard many tales of the rush the fall before and about many funny, crooked and tragicomic incidents.

Among the first ever to look for gold in the Beaverlodge area was a certain man by the name of Borden. He had conceived the idea that the gold was in the middle of a high gabbro hill, which, dark and gloomy, rose out of the centre of an almost circular bay a few miles from Beaverlodge. He pictured the high hills

surrounding the bay and the gabbro hill itself as the concentric shells of a crucible or a coconut. And they had to be pierced before the sweet nut-meat—the gold in the centre—could be reached.

Since then he had spent many summers and much money—he had once been considered wealthy—in an effort to reach the gold. He had a fine scow built from good cedar-wood in McMurray. With this he transported all his supplies to the spot. While the work was in progress he lived in it. He hired several men to help him drive a tunnel into the heart of the hill. But before he got there his money gave out, and he was forced to suspend work. Now he just sat near his tunnel, guarding it against people who would steal his gold. And as soon as a new mining company came into the field he would try to sell them his ‘mine’. But nobody wanted to buy a hole in the ground.

Another tragicomic incident had occurred during the height of the rush the summer before. A man, who at the time was working for a syndicate, went ahead and staked a piece of ground for himself—in his wife’s name, to keep it secret from his employers, and also from a prospector, a friend of his, who had made a bit of a find on it but had been tardy about staking. A procedure which, although not against the letter of the law, since it involved a two-way double-cross, could hardly be called ethical.

Some time later he went with an innocent mien to the prospector whose ground he had filched and offered to sell it. The other man, who meanwhile had staked the land around, replied that he would buy ‘if the price was right’. With the claim-jumper as his guide he inspected the property to make sure that it was properly staked. While walking across it he happened to slip on a mossy rock, uncovering a quartz vein. Without stopping he knocked loose a fragment, put it in his pocket, and continued his walk. At the end of the inspection he asked for the price, and paid on the spot without a murmur. A few days later he sold the whole group, including his own surrounding claims, for twenty times the price he had paid. In addition to the little find he had before, the rock fragment had contained a speck of free gold. As he himself commented later, it would probably have cost him much

more to prospect the ground by usual methods than it had this way. This property became one of the most promising in the field.

The same piece of land had played a prominent role in an earlier incident. A prospector who had received some small gold values from samples taken in the area a few years before had interested a mining company sufficiently to make them send their geologist to inspect the find. After a cursory examination the geologist summoned the prospector and some of his friends to his tent, which he had pitched on the shore of a sheltered little cove nearby. He urged them not to waste any more time on their prospects. The whole area was no good, there was no chance of gold or any other precious mineral occurring there. The bedrock was all granite, and there was never any gold in granite. Then he left.

Two years later the aforementioned find of free gold was made in the very granite he condemned and only a few feet from the spot where his tent had stood while he delivered his condemnation. In dealing with gold, exceptions seem to apply oftener than rules and nature seems determined to confuse the experts.

One more incident is worth telling, partly because it is typical of a new mining camp and because an old acquaintance, Ed Knox, again plays the leading role. He seems to have been an unusually bad actor.

When Knox, fearing the anger of Old Gus, deserted the field, he made his way down to Regina to bask in the sunshine of his new-found fame, and the adulation which was accorded him for his 'find'. Nobody yet knew the true state of things. There he took the opportunity to record a group of claims, which he had once held but allowed to lapse, before attending to the little formality of restaking them first. Soon afterward he hurried back to Beaverlodge and found that a couple of other men had already staked part of the ground, and were bent on staking the rest also. But by keeping a straight face and talking like an angel, Knox managed to convince them that he still held the ground, and that the maps, which showed that it was open, were wrong. The other two left the spot, allowing Knox to go around quietly changing the inscriptions on his old corner posts. Apparently Johnson had

been right when he said that Knox was 'as smooth and softspoken as a travelling revivalist preacher after a farmer's daughter'.

Among those who awaited the coming of spring in Beaverlodge were many real characters, men whose lonely existence had developed those traits which civilization had dulled in others. In effect the individuality which nature had given them had been allowed to develop untrammeled. The result was often an eccentric.

One such man was Jack Macy, a one-eyed veteran of the first war. He had lived alone for many years and been allowed to develop his own theories on geology without hindrance or argument for so long that he now firmly believed in them himself; moreover he was ready to defend them at any time with anybody. But his ideas were so amazing that they left any adversary with even a smattering of geology wordless and convinced of the folly of an attempt at factual discussion with such an obvious lunatic; usually he ended the talk as quickly as possible. But to Jack such a retreat was the proof of the absolute accuracy of his theories, and also that the logic of his arguments had bested his adversary and refuted his statements. Clucking gleefully Jack would then brag about his victories. If his adversary had happened to be some authority, the victory, of course, tasted that much sweeter.

But Jack was cagey and he threw a monkey wrench into the plans of an influential if not entirely straight mining outfit. Their field-man had blanketed a valuable piece of ground, i.e. ostensibly staked it but used a fictitious licence number and name. It is a procedure not entirely unknown in other fields either, and often resorted to when one wants more ground than one is entitled to. To keep it one only needs to let some friend stake it legally before others find out. In this case Jack had found out first, and quietly restaked the land for himself. Whereupon he sat down 'to wait and see what would develop'.

Some time later his patience was rewarded by a visit from the president of the mining company which had originally blanketed the ground. He wanted to buy the claim since it adjoined his. Jack replied that he had already more or less promised it to the people who owned the land on the other side, but asked what the

president was willing to pay. When he had been told the price Jack said that the other outfit had offered him almost twice that much because . . . Jack then proceeded to prove, with the help of his own ideas on geology, why his particular piece of ground was especially valuable.

The visitor's features clouded as he listened; then he became angry and finally he exploded. He did not know Jack and his theories, and thought that he was being made the butt of some rough joke. He left in a huff after he had assured Jack that he would not pay him a cent for all his land, even if it were the last acre of damned mining property in the world and as rich as Eldorado.

Jack was a bit puzzled about his visitor's sudden bad temper, but shrugged it off, it was due to ulcers or something. That spring, when the snow melted, he started prospecting his ground and made a promising strike. Subsequently he sold the property to the company which had the ground next door and for a higher price than he had mentioned to the first prospective customer.

The fact that he had made a find was to Jack the final proof of the accuracy of his theories of geology. From then on he became a regular nuisance, because of his everlasting attempts to engage anybody anywhere in a geological discussion. Soon all avoided him.

But this is to rush a little ahead of events. As yet, Jack had not made his find or become a prophet and was still endurable company.

A really remarkable character was 'The Yukon Kid'.

He was there one morning. He appeared at Gus's door, kind and diffident, a little, spare and unbelievably dirty old man with long white hair and flowing whiskers, clear blue eyes and the buoyant step of a sixteen-year-old. He was dressed in a knitted woollen cap, fringed buckskin coat and pants and beaded moosehide moccasins. A fantastic apparition, Leatherstocking come to life or perhaps the prototype to Robert Service's miner from the creeks.

Only a few of the prospectors present knew him, but almost everyone had heard of him. From them I heard what little was really known about him, and that was as strange as the man himself. It seems that he had been in all the gold camps and rushes

during the past half-century, in Cripple Creek and Comstock, in Yukon and Alaska, in the Porcupine area and now lately in Red Lake and Little Long Lac. Wherever gold was found he also turned up sooner or later, always alone, always looking the same. How he got there nobody knew; he just appeared. He seemed independent of ordinary means of transportation.

Whether he had ever found anything nobody knew. In any case it had made little difference to his mode of life, and he continued as before to follow the strikes.

The secret of his apparently magic ease in getting from place to place was simply that during the half-century he had lived in the bush he had become one with it. He was a perfect woodsman, who put us others, for all our experience, to shame. He made us, with all our canoes, dog-teams, outboard motors and other elaborate equipment, look like a bunch of awkward bunglers.

All he needed, besides his axe and 22-calibre rifle and a length of fish-net, was a bit of fish-line, some pieces of brass wire for rabbit snares and a few other odds and ends, including a threadbare blanket, which all fitted comfortably in a little rucksack. With this outfit he travelled across the land as he pleased. His slight frame seemed impervious to hunger and cold and—as his actions suggested—to age.

This time he arrived on foot, pulling a little hand-sleigh, slightly bigger than a child's toboggan, loaded with all his possessions. In a week he built himself a cabin—only an over-size dog-house really—at the edge of the settlement, and moved in.

Although 'The Kid' mostly kept to himself, he was by no means a hermit or afraid of people. He just liked his own company. But if one came visiting, he was friendly and talkative and talked willingly about his adventures and experiences. They were well worth listening to. His lively blue eyes shone when he spoke of gold camps and people, which one had perhaps read about in books, and events that already had become history. One had a peculiar feeling of timelessness; a story-book character was telling his own story.

'The Kid' remained in Beaverlodge for almost a year, often making long prospecting trips into the hills. Then one day he was

gone. But he appeared again in the fall—in Yellowknife, on the north shore of Great Slave Lake, three hundred miles away.

While I waited for the snow to melt, I studied all available maps and gathered up all the information I could to find the best spot to go prospecting. All the 'favourable' ground in the immediate vicinity had already been staked. I had to go farther afield for good formation.

But where? The geological maps were sketchy and inadequate, with very little detail, and thus of little help. And though my prospector friends were very helpful with general information, they naturally would not divulge any information about good locations where they themselves intended to work. I scratched my head and looked at my maps.

Finally Gus, helpful as ever, pointed out a spot where the formation was considered favourable, and where gold values had already been found. Since this area as yet had not been closely prospected, and was also still largely open for staking, I decided to try my luck there first.

So far, all the gold finds in the Beaverlodge area had been made in little bodies of quartz and granite porphyry, severly shattered and criss-crossed by hundreds of veins and veinlets of quartz. These porphyry bodies formed lenses, usually in older granite or quartzite. The gold occurred chiefly in the quartz, but to some extent also in the porphyry itself, and was associated with pyrite, chalco-pyrite, arseno-pyrite and sometimes with galena and zinc-blende. The porphyry bodies had been found over a large area, but so far only those near Beaverlodge had proved valuable. But these of course were also the best prospected.

As spring progressed the activity in the tent town also increased. The men in camp prepared for the season and looked over their outfits. Planes with new gold hunters arrived and new tents, fresh from the factory, blossomed forth on the bare spots in the clearing.

In one of these planes Jack Shirley arrived, a journalist from Regina who intended to stay over break-up to report to his paper on life and conditions in the new gold camp. Jack was a stocky, blond and ruddy-faced man in his early forties. His bright blue

eyes had a strained, near-sighted look, but his lips wore an easy smile. He established himself in Gus's cabin and at once became popular with the boys, not just because of his trade, although that helped. Prospectors like newspapermen, on the theory that publicity is good business. It does not really matter what kind of publicity as long as one's property and one's name reaches print. People forget facts quicker than names. Just get the name of your find in the paper often enough, and that will do. Besides, facts can always be embellished a little. If one's story is convincing enough, the scribe might fall for and repeat at least part of it. Thus Jack was quickly served the rosiest accounts of the finds in the neighbourhood and invited to inspect pits, shafts and even mere outcrops.

But Jack was a likeable fellow too, jolly and brimful of just the right kind of smoking-room stories that went over well with the gang. And he cemented his popularity the first evening by pulling a couple of bottles of rum out of his packsack.

It soon became evident that Jack did not intend to content himself with just writing about gold-mines; he wanted to find one too. One morning he came to me and proposed partnership. He would pay for our food and other expenses on the trip, and the recording fees for any claims that we might stake, and then either try to sell them outside, or, if they looked really good, interest people he knew in Regina. I would contribute transportation, my knowledge of prospecting and the bush and the area. If I agreed, he would wire for additional supplies that very morning. After some consideration—I was impatient to leave—I agreed and sat down to wait a few days longer, until the food he had sent for should arrive. It was to come with the next plane.

But the next plane brought no grub, nor did the one after. Instead, they only spewed forth more and more prospectors and their equipment. Other cargo was thrown aside at the airports to accommodate them. Impatiently we cursed and kicked our heels and wired. It was of little avail.

Among the new arrivals was a pair who, while they remained in Beaverlodge, provided the whole camp with amusement. Almost at once they were christened Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

The Don was a tall, scrawny individual with a hook nose, bushy eyebrows, a wisp of thin white hair and a voice like a knife. A well-to-do prospector now, he had spent many years in the bush when he was young. But lately he had lived in Toronto for years, 'never out of sight of some goddamned skirt', where he had been forced to watch his tongue for so long that he feared that some of his most prized expressions had grown rusty and ineffective with disuse. Out in the bush again for the first time in years, he was prepared to enjoy his newfound freedom to the hilt. There were no females within a hundred miles. Now he was going to loosen his tongue and give it full freedom of expression. He immediately set out to do so.

Sancho by contrast was short and stout, had a round moon-face, a deep booming voice and jolly deportment. His disposition was imperturbably good, his speech often laced with quiet humour. He seemed to have a faculty of raising the Don's temper without effort. I suspect that the Don had brought him along mainly as a target for choice abuse, a target not easily offended, but who would also reply in the same spirit and thus give reason for additional epithets. This was necessary too, because the Don knew an unbelievable number of unprintable curses and expressions which he would yell out at the top of his voice. His language, when he spoke to Sancho, was so choice in its insulting tone and disparaging remarks that the listener had to smile. Sancho's deep-voiced and often witty reply would change the grin to a laugh.

Their dialogues were never whispered and could be heard all over the camp. When they really warmed up, everybody would enjoy it. As long as they were there the battle continued uninterrupted, without any visible result even in the form of injured feelings. I suspect that they both enjoyed it equally.

Our provisions finally arrived, and we made feverish preparations to leave the next morning. The plane that brought them also carried a parcel addressed to the Don and marked 'drill parts'. Don Quixote bore it in triumph to Gus's cabin, where it was opened at once and found to contain a one-gallon canister of grain alcohol.

After that events proceeded rapidly and in disorderly fashion. Under the Don's supervision Sancho brewed a punch in the water-

pail, cups and mugs were hastily procured and handed around. The party got under way. The even ordinarily cramped cabin was soon bursting with thirsty customers, who diligently dipped their mugs in the pail, sang and talked. Their voices became steadily louder. The din finally reached such proportions that I feared that the walls, like those of Jericho, would fall and bury the whole gang of sinful roisterers. But the punch came to an end towards morning, and even the hardiest had to go to bed. Both Jack and I were happy about that, because we were starting out in the morning and were grateful for a little rest before leaving.

But we had scarcely laid our heads on our pillows when we were awakened by loud cries and curses, and rushed up still befuddled by sleep. From the attic came the Don's voice: 'Help! Fire! Help!' Heavy smoke poured down from the vent. Then there was the sound of much activity and a short silence. Then came Sancho's calm words: 'O.K. It's out.' The danger was over and we lay down again.

Suddenly the Don's voice, shrill and loud, issued forth again. He launched himself into a diatribe of vituperation, showering Sancho with the most horrible invective: '—— goddamned idiot! Help me for such a ——! You should be hanged by —— or have —— cut off! Your —— mother should have drowned you in —— before you were born, you ——!'

It seemed that the Don had gone to sleep leaving a candle burning on a stack of magazines. These had caught fire, and were burning briskly, when he woke up yelling and coughing among the clouds of smoke.

But Sancho was master of the situation. Quickly he threw the Don's sleeping bag over the flames and smothered them in a jiffy. Incidentally he burned a hole in the sleeping bag at the same time. When the danger was past, and the Don went to bed again, he discovered the damage. That started the new tirade.

It was still in progress when Gus, usually quiet and peaceful, spoke up with authority: 'Shut up and go to bed! You've done enough damage for one night!'

It was suddenly quiet upstairs. The Don was thoroughly squelched for once. He had not expected any admonitions from

that source. Soon the cabin again reverberated with the snores of inebriated sleepers.

But after every night comes morning. The next one was not a happy one. At least not for most of the company. They again made frequent trips to the water-pail, but this time for a less potent, though perhaps a more refreshing, drink than the night before. Only Jack and I, thinking of our departure, had been moderate and trotted briskly around, packing our sleigh and harnessing our dogs.

Just before we left, we heard Sancho in a rusty voice urge the Don to wire Edmonton for a repeat order of 'drill parts', but we hardly listened to the Don's reply. We were impatient to be on our way, because now we were going out after the mine that we had been dreaming about. I almost yelled 'Gold!' instead of 'Mush!' to the dogs—and we were off.

CHAPTER IV

THE morning was made for sleigh-rides. The dogs jumped joyously, barking and whining in the traces, or strained eagerly to be off. They sped away over the glassy surface of the drifts, that had been tempered hard by the previous night's frost. The cold nipped ears and nose, but the air was clear as crystal and easy to breathe. A down-like quilt of wood-smoke hovered about twenty feet above the ground in the still air, shrouding spruce tops in sheer veils. But the sun, whose first rays painted the trees a warm brownish green and the snow a shining violet, already gave notice that the day would be hot. Shirley sat on the load and I loped behind as the sleigh slid easily through the narrows and out on the lake.

It was almost noon when we arrived at our goal, Elliot Bay, fifteen miles west of Beaverlodge. Here we found other gold hunters ahead of us. Sitting on upturned packing boxes with their backs against the sun-baked wall of a log cabin, three men were taking their ease. Long before we got there their clothes and other equipment told me that they were trappers.

One of them proved to be an old friend, Magnuson, and it did not take long to make acquaintance with his partners. In a few minutes I found out that they had been on their way to their trapping grounds, north along the Mackenzie River, the previous fall, when they heard about the gold strike, and were side-tracked to Beaverlodge instead. After staking some claims near Elliot Bay they had stayed on and trapped north from Lake Athabaska.

While we were getting acquainted a couple more men crawled out of a brand-new tent that stood a little way off from the cabin.

'Prospectors,' replied Magnus to my questioning look. I nodded—the intonation told me all I wanted to know.

The two men joined us silently and examined us and our outfit curiously, but also with a certain hostility, as if we were trespassing on their property. After a while, without any unnecessary preliminaries such as greetings, they started to ask us questions. The dirt and unshorn whiskers on their faces, the 'practical' clothes and the soiled hands placed them at once. They announced plainer than if it had been written all over them in foot-high letters: 'Greenhorn!'

In line with the idea quite prevalent among city dwellers, that one is not supposed to wash, shave, change underwear or speak civilly in the bush, these two had followed their inclinations freely. They had really enjoyed the privilege of walking around with their flies open, blowing their noses in their fingers and wiping them on the brand-new khaki pants, and not washing or combing their hair. In the belief that a dirty face is the first step toward woodcraft, and that all bushmen roll in filth, they had in one week achieved their idea of the look and smell of old-timers.

By and by we got to know them also, and when they found out that Jack had arrived only four days ago they at once became patronizing to him. After all, they had already been there more than a week, and there have to be grades even in the hierarchy of the wilds. Shortly after, one of them started to teach us geology; it appeared that he had during the winter taken a mail-order course in the subject, while he prepared for the trip here. He even had a diploma to prove that he was an expert. About two weeks earlier, they had arrived in the Cannery by plane and then been freighted here by a dog-team.

These two also had some very definite ideas on the people of the North, and one soon became aware of the fact that they considered anybody who lived there either a moron, an illiterate savage or perhaps a fugitive from justice. They also considered it their bounden duty to dispense their own knowledge freely among these ignoramuses.

So the three trappers enjoyed themselves royally at the expense of their new guests. Dan, one of the newcomers, had for some

reason acquired a great respect for George Johnson, the oldest of the trappers, a tall greying man of fifty. His calm and dignified manner concealed a great rogue. George was born in Massachusetts but had spent more than half of his life in the North. In spite of their firm conviction of their own superiority the two newcomers still believed every word George said as if he were quoting Scripture.

Jack and I pitched our tent in a spruce grove not far from the cabin and were busy fixing up the camp-site all afternoon. But that night, after supper, we drifted over to the cabin, where all the other men had gathered around a campfire to smoke and chat. Sitting on logs or rocks they looked into the flames, added some fuel and spoke slowly.

Old George lighted his pipe with an ember from the fire, and slowly puffing on it said: 'Look, Thompson, wasn't that a bitch wolf who howled over that way a while ago?' He pointed to the hills with his pipe stem.

Thompson nodded gravely. 'I'm not sure, George. I was inside washing up and couldn't hear well enough to tell whether it was a bitch or a whelp.'

'You've tied your dogs close enough to the cabin though, so's they're safe all right,' asked George. His voice sounded a little anxious.

'Oh sure. But you don't have to worry. I don't think they'll try to tackle the dogs yet tonight. There's still too many caribou around,' Magnus cut in reassuringly.

'Don't be too sure. I'm going to keep my rifle handy anyway,' Thompson replied, obviously a bit worried.

'You fellows are crazy! You don't mean that the wolves would attack the dogs with all the people around?' one of the 'prospectors' asked, alarmed.

'It's not impossible, Dan. I recall once when I was trapping on the north shore of Great Bear Lake . . .'

And so the stories started. The three companions were wonderfully well matched and convincing. They served one hair-raising yarn after another. The later it got the worse they became and the bigger the eyes of the 'prospectors' and the more timorous the

expression in them. They listened avidly and no matter how terrible the stories they believed every word. And Old George performed with a mastery that even the most inveterate sea-captain might envy. He populated the whole bush with man-eating bears, wolves and wolverines, and talked convincingly of Cree medicine, evil spirits and spooks, told of mysterious disappearances and unexplained murders.

It was quite late when we went to bed that night. I was tired, but before falling asleep I smiled at the thought of the two 'prospectors', who were certain to lie wide awake, with eyes, ears and rifles cocked, far into the morning.

There was still much snow in the bush, but rather than sit around camp we made long trips into the surroundings. At least the tops of the ridges were getting bare and would give us some idea of what to expect in the area. In the evenings we met around the fire and compared notes.

Dan and Jim had good rifles and, after listening to George and his partners for a few nights, they never went far from the tent without them. Either they did not notice that the rest of us never carried any arms, or else they believed that we were protected by some friendly spirit against the dangers that lurked behind every shrub.

The weather turned suddenly very warm. The sun shone as in midsummer. A mild south wind blew among the trees, and in a day the whole country came loose at the joints. The snow sank and shrank with loud sighs and disintegrated; the bare patches of ground grew before one's eyes. In every draw there was a brook, in every valley ran a river, and on the ice the water lay in shiny pools a foot deep. Meadows changed into lakes, the muskegs were bottomless. Spring was here.

Overnight it became impossible to walk around in the bush. We were forced to stay in camp.

One morning Jim came into the cabin and said breathlessly: 'There are some ANIMALS out on the ice. They are moving. Wonder if they are wolves?'

We ran outside and looked. Then we suddenly became very active, running for rifles and knives. Caribou! Meat! Food for us

and our dogs! There they came in a long line, steadily marching in single file into the bay. Eight, ten, eleven, twelve we counted. They were still almost a mile away but approaching steadily at a trot, a large doe in the lead. In ten minutes they would be here.

I felt my mouth water. This was wonderful. Fresh caribou steak for dinner. Quickly we laid our plans. George and Thompson were to run along the shore east of the caribou's course and hide behind some rocks at the shore. Magnus and I would steal out to some islands and cut off their escape to the west. Jim and Dan, who were already shaking with buck fever and were grasping their already cocked rifles with white-knuckled fists, were sharply admonished to remain hidden near the cabin, and not to shoot before the caribou were within range or before the rest of us, who would be much nearer to begin with. Then we were off.

Magnus and I sneaked through the bush until the islands were between us and the deer. Then we cut across the ice. Magnus took a position on the outside island, I on the inner one. I looked apprehensively at the animals, and let out my breath. Evidently we had all succeeded in getting to our ambushes undetected, for the line of deer came trotting onwards unconcernedly, the old doe in the lead head low and seemingly tired of it all, the others—following with dragging feet.

They were still out of my range when there was a sudden fusillade of rifle shots from the cabin. Damnation! The two 'prospectors' were blazing away like mad, probably spoiling our hunt.

The caribou stopped, turned quickly and galloped—their apathy suddenly gone—fifty miles an hour out toward the open lake and safety. Now we also had to start firing, though the range was long, to get some of them at least before they got away. It sounded like a busy day on the western front.

Aiming at the leading animal I shot as fast as I could. Suddenly it dropped like a sack, hit either by Magnus or me. The others—believing that danger lurked ahead—turned and galloped back into the bay again. Hooray! Now we would get more. One more dropped, then another one. A buck suddenly stumbled, and then slid on stiff legs through a pool of snow-water, the spray glittering

in the sun, and tumbled on its side like a broken toy horse. A couple of wounded ones lay down on the ice while the others milled around in confusion.

Then three animals broke from the main herd and ran straight for the island where I was. I spent my last two shells trying to turn them back. But with no result—the deer kept on coming. When I saw that they were going to escape through the narrows between Magnus and me, I ran out on the ice, yelling and waving my arms to stop them. But that was an assinine idea. I had hardly left my shelter when I was met by the shrill whistle and felt the breath of a bullet past my ear. Promptly I flopped right in the middle of a six-inch pool of snow-water, cursing both the ‘prospectors’ and my own idiocy. The three caribou meanwhile ran right past me and disappeared through the narrows out on the big lake.

Then it was quiet. The hunt was over. The other deer were either dead or too badly wounded to escape. I got up gingerly and ready to flatten out again quickly, if the need arose, and walked toward Magnus. He came out on the ice, and together we walked back toward camp. But as soon as we rounded the first point another bullet whistled past, and down we went again.

Magnus, who until now had been dry, lay there and swore loudly about guns, children and irresponsible maniacs. Now, however, even our prospector friends must have realized that we were not caribou, because no more bullets came our way and we dared to get up again. Perhaps Jack, who had stayed with them, had managed to convince them that there were no two-legged deer.

Back in camp we found Dan and Jim in an argument over who had shot the most deer. They hardly noticed our arrival. Magnus interrupted them bitterly: ‘Sure, you’ve both shot twice as many deer as there are out there and you came goddamned close getting a couple of men besides. Next time I see you lay hold of those rifles I’ll break them!’

That dampened their ardour a little. But not for long. During the next few days we heard the big hunt discussed so thoroughly and often that I winced when I heard the word caribou. In addition they managed to persuade George, who seemed to take

some sort of perverse delight in adding fuel to their argument, to skin a couple of the animals and stretch their hides, although the skins, due to springiness and parasitic larvae, were useless at this time of the year. They probably hang over the fireplace in the respective hunters' homes now. I can visualize the Nimrod entertaining his friends: 'I recall in the spring of 1935, when I was prospecting down North on Lake Athabasca. . . .'

Jack Shirley, who did not fire a shot and stayed in the safety of the cabin, gained more than anybody else on the whole business. He wrote a whale of a story about the hunt for a magazine and collected a fat fee.

Still, we had meat and dog-feed for weeks ahead. And that night there was a banquet in the cabin. On the stove two panfuls of fresh liver were slowly frying, and a pot, with wonderfully fat and tender caribou tongues and vegetables, simmered beside it, spreading a pungent appetizing aroma around the cabin, making us swallow spasmodically in anticipation.

So the steaming kettle was finally put on the table and each in turn speared a caribou tongue dripping with fat. I was contentedly eating mine when I heard Dan ask: 'Say, George, why are you peeling the skin from that tongue?'

George looked up but continued to peel. Finally he replied gravely: 'Well, you see, Dan, caribou are like dogs; they always lick themselves in all sorts of places, and I like to play safe.'

'Oh no! You don't mean that, do you?' Dan laid his caribou tongue on the plate and looked suspiciously at us, especially at George. We stared stolidly at our plates as we ate. Dan looked at his tongue again; then he started awkwardly to peel it. Magnus suddenly got a coughing fit. He choked and became red as a beet in the face and finally had to leave the table.

The thaw continued and in a few days all the snow disappeared. Now we waited only for the water to run off sufficiently to let us cross creeks and valleys.

All the countless brooks which flowed out on the ice quickly ate holes in it and soon all the water had drained through, leaving the ice high and dry to walk on. Simultaneously, fat buds appeared on the birches, willows and aspens.

In a few days we resumed our prospecting, and gradually extended it farther afield. Now we hardly gave ourselves time to eat breakfast before starting out in the morning. All day long we climbed hills, scaled cliffs, waded through creeks and swamps and clambered over windfalls, lying in disorderly heaps, sometimes very hard to get through. Between the logs and upturned roots, birch and aspen saplings formed nearly impenetrable thickets. The area was about as rough as one could wish for.

Wherever we went we chipped rocks. Chiefly we looked for quartz veins or patches of rust—or ‘gossan’ or ‘burn’ as it is called in prospecting circles—and any other suspicious-looking stain that could be caused by the oxidation of metallic minerals. A reddish-brown spot on a hillside would make us trot over hill and dale like young moose, and if we found a rock that contained even one little crystal of pyrite, we did not have the heart to throw it away, but put it at once into our packsack. Still, porphyry was the thing that we really searched for; porphyry was the watchword; everybody talked about and dreamed about and looked for porphyry. The ideal was to find a lens of it cut by numerous ‘mineralized’ quartz veins. The word ‘mineralized’ among mining men means a rock containing metallic minerals, and thus has a more restricted meaning than the conventional one. These porphyry bodies were supposed to be outliers from a large granite batholith further away. All those found so far contained gold. These bodies of porphyry were then the thing to find.

It was huge piles of rock we lugged home those first nights. Jack especially, unused to bush life, was exhausted every night, so that he was hardly able to drag himself home on aching feet and stagger under his load. Our packsacks, our pockets, sometimes even our caps bulged with rocks. Every night Jack swore that he was not going to move a fin the next morning. But groaning and moaning he still got out of bed and padded on in my wake with clenched teeth until his muscles softened up again. I had to admire his spunk; like a bulldog, he just would not give up in spite of his poor physical condition.

After several days, during which we ranged further and further, we found one morning first one then several small porphyry

dykes and lenses of the kind we had been looking for. They lay right along a contact between quartzite and granite with several small bodies of gabbro accompanying. The porphyry which was grey to red was cut by countless quartz veinlets and some veins. In the veins we found all the minerals that were common with gold in this field, pyrite, chalco-pyrite, arseno-pyrite, galena and zinc blende.

It was an ideal find with an ideal location. It filled all the requirements for the occurrence of gold in the area. It was just what we had been looking for.

In a frenzy we ran back and forth over the outcrops and pounded and knocked chips from them. Frequently Jack would shout to me and I would scramble over to him to see what he had found. Or I would do the same with him. Occasionally we would fall into trance-like silences, as we squinted through our mineral glasses at some shiny speck that might be free gold. Mineralization was so abundant in some quartz veins that in places where it had been weathered out the remaining quartz could be crushed between the fingers into a rusty sand. This really was a find, it looked every bit as good as anything we had seen.

It was already dusk when we started home and our loads of rock samples would have made a jackass proud. Jack groaned under his burden and made me witness to his oath that the next day we would rest! But we were happy as children at Christmas when we saw the lights of the camp. We had made a find!

Our friends too were really impressed with our samples, and agreed that this looked like the 'real thing', and that our stuff looked every bit as good as the ore from the Box mine. I went to bed dog-tired but blissful.

But I had hardly touched my head to the pillow when I started worrying. Had I said too much about our find? Maybe Jim or Dan or somebody else could figure out its location from what Jack or I had told them and would sneak off and stake it before we got there in the morning? Or maybe some other prospector in the neighbourhood had heard all the noise we had made and had come spying and started staking as soon as we left?

All night I slept fitfully, dreaming of crooks and large nuggets

that slipped through my hands just as I was about to pick them up. And when I woke up I found that Jack had already made fire in the stove and was cooking breakfast—Jack, who usually did not get up until I almost kicked him out of bed, and even then loudly protesting.

At once I understood why, and my uneasiness increased. In a jiffy we ate and were off, making a beeline for our find. And it was only when, panting after our fast march, we stopped on the biggest outcrop, and saw it lie there peacefully, just as we had left it the night before, that our anxiety eased and we sat down. But even then we were not entirely calm before we had staked four claims covering the find. Gold fever had us in its clutches. Our sense of humour, values and proportions, our common sense was gone. In fact we just lacked plain sense.

Many times afterwards I have observed the results of gold fever both in myself and in others, and have had many a laugh; but that does not help at all. Gold fever is a real sickness—a sickness of the mind—and only time cures it, sometimes.

Just then the danger of somebody jumping our find seemed very real to us. It did not help a bit to tell myself that the stuff had lain there since the beginning of time without anybody finding it, and that it probably would take years before anybody even came near it again; I was still anxious. Even when one makes a find deep in the bush, miles from another prospector, and one covers it up and hides it under moss, one is still afraid of claim jumpers.

That is gold fever. One suspects everybody and everything. One sneaks around in the bush as quietly as possible, stopping frequently to make sure that one is not being followed. One tries to hide one's trail and makes elaborate twists and circles in it to lead a spy astray. One starts at the least noise, and stands motionless, hardly daring to breath, and is afraid of going near the find for fear of leading somebody to it.

In the company of others one is elaborately casual about one's strike, but suspects a trap in the most innocent question, evil designs in every act of friendship. While one waits for assay results on the samples one is nervous, irritable and restless, at the same time walking on clouds, building castles and dreaming of cruises.

Gold fever is perhaps akin to love. One is just as anxious, as happy and as unhappy as a boy in love for the first time. And one is as jealous as an impotent man with an attractive wife.

Jack and I had a bad attack. During the next few days we rushed around in a frenzy, trying to find all we could before somebody else came, carefully scouring the surroundings for new and promising things. One day, Jack, who was some hundred yards away, suddenly raised his voice in a terrible yowl 'Hi, Erik, come here!'

Like a young bull moose I ran over rocks and stumps and found him excitedly pounding away at a quartz vein. He held out a fragment full of gleaming blue-grey crystals. 'Look! Galena!'

I looked 'Sure enough. How in the heck did you know?' I asked, impressed. Jack smiled modestly. 'Well, I've picked up a thing or two in these last few weeks.' Galena is a lead mineral which commonly also contains silver and in this area invariably also gold. Silver and gold! Hooray!

In great joy we grabbed each other's hands and executed a war-dance on the flat outcrop, after which we settled down to search for more. We found the continuation of the vein farther on and there it was richer yet.

We were very happy when we got to camp that night and at once showed our finest samples to Magnus, who was there alone. He looked them over carefully and then at our shining faces and said very tactfully:

'Well, I don't know much about these things, of course, but I've been told that this kind of stuff is iron. When you scratch it with a knife it leaves a red mark.'

He scratched one crystal. We looked. The streak was red. Our faces fell but we tried again. Same result. Magnus was right, the mineral was specular hematite, an oxide of iron. Silently we walked back to our tent.

But little setbacks like that did not dampen our spirits for long. We continued to search around our first find. But after a week we had found nothing even nearly as good, and so we decided to stake some more claims around it and along the contact on both sides of it.

Staking is hard and slow work if one wants to do it properly. Each claim shall be as nearly as possible square and either one-quarter of a mile or fifteen hundred feet to a side, depending on the law of the province in which it lies. The borders should run east-west and north-south as nearly as possible, and each corner must be plainly marked with a wooden post, four inches thick, squared and marked with the number of the post, the name of the claim, its owner and his mining-licence number. The number-one post, which stands in the north-east corner, is the one from which all measurements start, and in case of dispute decides ownership, must in addition carry the date, hour and minute of staking. The other posts are numbered clockwise from number one. The borders between the claims must be plainly marked either by blazes or cut lines. Depending on the province, the holder of a mining licence is entitled to from three to eighteen claims in each mining district or division per year.

The claims must be recorded within a given time from the date of the staking. This is usually 15 days plus one additional day for each 10 miles or fraction thereof from the nearest recording office by travelled route. In the Beaverlodge area the time limit in those days was 129 days. The nearest recording office, by way of McMurray and Edmonton, lay in Regina.

Where one-line staking is not in effect these rules are substantially the same all over Canada.

We grouped our claims around the four first, every day adding a few more to the 'Regina' group, as we called it in honour of the provincial capital and Shirley's home town.

Where the bush is thick the staking of one claim is a good day's work for one man, especially if he cuts lines along the borders and builds regulation rock mounds around the corner posts. To begin with we tried to speed up work by each staking a claim, but Jack was a bit nearsighted and his sense of direction a little weak. At times he became lost and would stubbornly argue about directions, almost believing that the sun had changed its course just to spite and confuse him. This became such a touchy subject that we tacitly changed our system and started working together.

Starting at the north-east corner we put in the No. 1 post. From there Jack started south, to put in the No. 2 post at the south-east corner of the claim, and then continued straight west and met me at the south-west corner. I was to cut the north and west boundaries and put in the Nos. 3 and 4 posts.

Jack hoisted the ready No. 2 post on to his shoulder and started merrily whistling his way south. I started cutting westward. When I arrived at the south-west corner I hewed and marked the post, put it in the mound and sat down to wait. But no Jack appeared, and I decided to start cutting toward him. I finally encountered him at the south-east corner, where he had just sat down for a rest and was wiping the perspiration from his forehead. After a smoke I got up and started walking away.

'Hey, we got to put in the post,' Jack said.

I stopped. 'What do you mean—didn't you put it in? You had it with you.'

'No. That was for the south-east corner. Remember?' Jack replied firmly. 'And this is the south-west corner.'

'Oh no, this is the south-east corner!'—I suddenly smelled a rat. 'Say, where did you come from?' I asked.

'From over there,' Jack answered, a bit huffily, sensing criticism in my voice, and pointed east.

We walked that way. Sure enough. Neatly and properly Jack had put his post in the mound at the south-east corner of the next claim east!

In spite of little errors like that, the work went on. It began to make real progress when we worked together, one of us walking ahead with the compass and counting steps and the other behind cutting and blazing the line.

Those were wonderful days. The sun had finally, after the long winter, gained the upper hand and tried to make up for lost time. The snow had disappeared, the ice was going the same way and the little lakes were already open. Buds were racing each other to break, and the heady smell of running, swelling sap and young verdure forced a man to breathe deeply, shiveringly. As yet no mosquitoes had started to plague us. It was so warm that one could have walked around naked, even on the ice of Lake

Athabaska, with only a pair of shoes for protection against the sharp ice.

In the evenings our way back to camp led across a wide bay. We savoured fully the fresh air, the high light sky, the sun, the spring. And like the dwarfs in *Snow White* we marched homeward chanting our own song to the melody of the anvil chorus from *Il Trovatore*.

'Give us porphyry, porphyry with pyrite, chalco, black jack,
quartz and great big gobs of gold-ore,
We don't want gabbro, we don't want gabbro, we don't
want ga-a-a-abbro-o-o. . . .'

Then perhaps the ice would crack and rumble underfoot and we would scatter like scared quail.

Our friends in camp had also been very busy men, prospecting and staking a promising piece of ground to the north. Only Dan and Jim had left. When after a few days' search in the neighbourhood of the camp they had not found gold nuggets, they loaded their belongings on to a borrowed hand-sleigh and left in disgust.

It took two weeks of hard work to get our eighteen claims staked. As soon as that was done we prepared to return to Beaver-lodge. We were anxious to get there in time to send our samples for assay before break-up interrupted all air transportation for a month.

But before we could start I had to sew moccasins for my dogs. Without them their paws would be cut raw and bleeding after a few miles' running on the needle-sharp candle-ice of the big lake. There were twenty of them to cut and sew, and they took two days to make.

At last on a bright and clear morning we started. The ice was by then becoming poor near the shores and in the narrows, but out on the main lake it was still over four feet thick, and would remain so until some storm broke it up in the middle of June and ground it to mush against the rocky shores.

Although it was warm on the lake it was not yet summer. A half-mile or so beyond the shore birches and poplars were already

in leaf, but on the islands and on the shores of Lake Athabaska, so near the dangerous ice, they hardly dared poke their heads out of the buds. The haze of the sun and the heat from the sunbaked naked outcrops made the air over the ice shimmer in visible waves of hot and cold.

In spite of two pairs of moccasins and socks the needle-ice rubbed our feet raw and tender in a few miles. But as we continued briskly on hurting feet, we wondered if we would arrive in time to get our samples on the last plane for the outside before break-up.

CHAPTER V

PLANES were still flying between Beaverlodge and the outside and one was expected the afternoon that we arrived. So we quickly sorted our samples and sent what we considered our three best ones out for assay. Then we sat down to wait the three weeks or a month before we could hope to get our results.

We pitched our tent on a flat rock outcrop high above the camp, where the wind would keep the mosquitoes away, and from where we had a good view of the bay and the lake outside. And although we were nervous and impatient we did our best to appear calm and unconcerned to outsiders. But in the evenings, when we were alone, we discussed our find incessantly, gloated over the sensation our assays would cause in camp and the price we would receive for our property. Then we lay down to dream of gold nuggets, South Sea cruises and bathing beauties on sunny beaches.

I would be about ready to fall asleep when Jack's voice would come out of the dark: 'You know, I think I'll leave the kids in school just the way they are until they have finished, instead of taking them east or to England. They'll be much happier that way and able to adjust themselves better.'

'Uhuh, I think you're right, Jack. Leave them where their friends are until you've found the place where you want to live. . . You know, I think I'll move east rather than to the coast. The climate might not be as good, but I have more friends there. And I think I won't build any house before I get married or something, I'll just rent an apartment. It's less bother and . . .'

I would have continued indefinitely, but a couple of snores from Jack's bunk told me that he was not listening. So I lay awake and planned silently instead.

During the few short weeks we had been away, Beaverlodge had changed its face. It had awakened from its winter's sleep. Everywhere along the shores snow-white tents on new-hewn log-frames told of their owners' recent arrival. Airplanes flew oftener than before, bringing new men and equipment. A cluster of cabins was going up in the clearing near Gus's place and a couple of docks were being built nearby.

The sound of drilling and blasting could already be heard from the hills behind town, and other outfits were busily preparing their summer's work. Beaverlodge was taking the shape of a real little town, although most of the buildings so far were only tents on log and lumber frames.

Prospectors and other mining men still formed the majority. There were some speculators in mining claims and some promoters in the market for likely looking ground. But now also a couple of businessmen were looking the place over for a good site for a store. The prospective owner of a pool-hall and movie theatre tried to assess the possibilities, and a radio station was installed in a tent. On a flat spot in the clearing two brothers were erecting a large log-building to which the timbers were brought by dog-team. It was to be the town's first hotel.

In addition there were also some men looking for work. These were as yet few, but every arrival was telling about the hundreds of unemployed who were gathering at the end of steel in McMurray and Athabasca Landing awaiting break-up and a cheap way to get down. As soon as the ice left there would be an exodus for Beaverlodge.

We were also told of piles and piles of lumber, mining machinery and drills, stacks of food and other equipment that was arriving in McMurray for shipment to Beaverlodge. The season ahead would obviously be busy.

In the evenings we gathered around campfires in the open. Even though it was warm, a fire drew people as a candle lures moths. Maybe it was just the habit of years of outdoor life or an inherited instinct that asserted itself; the result was the same. Soon after a fire had been lighted it was surrounded by a full circle of talking and smoking men. And it was kept alive late into the night almost

automatically as in turn one man or another got up and fetched more fuel.

I remember especially one evening when the group around it was composed of men so different in most respects that it could scarcely be matched anywhere in the world. Next to me sat a geologist, part Hindu, part Scot, educated in England, India and the United States, who had been in every corner of the world and just then represented a Toronto concern. Beside him was a sour-dough who had been in the North since '98, prospecting, trapping, fishing and trading, and who was at present acting as cook in a nearby camp. Then followed a successful mine-owner, who had arrived by private plane, apparently to look for promising ground, but more likely to get away from a stuffy Bay Street office and back in the bush for a rest. Next to him squatted a former Hungarian hussar officer, now searching for ore with a 'doodle bug'; after that came 'The Count' and 'The Boy Scout', a peculiar pair, one German, the other American, then a couple of young geologists fresh from school, a sailor, a French-Canadian lumberjack, our first bootlegger and gambling-joint runner, Jack Shirley the journalist, a couple of trappers and a bible student out to save souls. There were still others whom I have forgotten.

It was a gathering so motley and at the same time so homogeneous that it could be duplicated only in some other out-of-the-way spot. Most of these men had something in common besides their rough outdoor clothing. In their weather-beaten features and their manner and speech was something which stamped them as men 'of the land'.

Everybody went by first names; the millionaire filled his pipe from the halfbreed trapper's pouch; the mining engineer listened to a trapper's account of the formation of some out-of-the-way corner of the Northland; the student to the lumberjack's account of his adventures with the girls in Montreal and to the sailor's experiences in Durban.

Here were told tales of Klondike by men who had taken part in the rush; stories about 'The Headless Valley' in the mysterious Nahanni River country, where men had disappeared without a trace, and where the Indian was still reported to be savage; from

the jungles of South America and from the fabulous 'Rand' in South Africa. Someone related stories of lost mines and risky canoe-trips, and showed samples bristling with free gold.

A rumour that also began to receive attention was that of rich gold finds farther north on the shores of Great Slave Lake near the mouth of Yellowknife River, a rumour that was already making some of the adventurers restless.

Rich and poor, success and failure, sourdough and cheechako sat here—the light of the fire playing on their features and glinting in their eyes—dreaming of fortunes and far-away lands. When they had gone to bed the embers of the fire still glowed until the break of the early spring day.

In the daytime there was hustle and bustle. In the early morning the camp was awakened by the sound of Don Quixote's strident voice as he heaped abuse on the head of poor Sancho. Now he had a really legitimate reason for castigating his partner. It seems that shortly before his departure from Edmonton Sancho had diverted himself with a lady, with the result that a few weeks later he found that some disagreeable little creatures had invaded the hairy parts of his person. It was really the Don who, when he had watched Sancho scratch himself in every imaginable place, accused him of harbouring the vermin and demanded an inspection. And—alas! It was true!

Immediately there was uproar. In five minutes the Don's loud-speaker-voice had proclaimed the news in choice phrases to the keenly interested camp, and calling for ointments and volunteer barbers. The camp responded nobly with plenty of good advice and even produced a jar of ointment. No barber volunteered though, probably because of Sancho's husky build. The Don drew a chalkline down the middle of the floor of their tent and dared Sancho to cross it. We had amusement for a week as the Don issued hourly bulletins on the progress of the battle of Casanova.

But another event, a very important one, was approaching and claimed increasing attention from the camp. The first white woman was about to descend on Beaverlodge. For a week now Steve, the hotelkeeper, had been busy building a tent frame and putting it in order to receive his young wife. Steve had been married in the

winter, but had interrupted his honeymoon to hunt for gold here. Now his bride was to join him after several months' separation. No wonder our interest was at a high pitch.

So one morning Steve had a wire that she would arrive the same day. While we awaited the plane discussion was ripe as to whether she would be fat or lean, blonde or brunette, a glamour girl or a good pal. As for looks—to bushmen there are only good-looking girls.

When the first hum of a far-away plane could be heard, loud cries reverberated from all parts of the camp: 'Steve! Steve!' and the whole male population—which meant everybody—converged on the landing-strip on the ice. The plane came in for a landing, but then passed on, the pilot seeming to have changed his mind, making ready to land in another bay. Steve started running toward the portage as fast as he could. Then the plane suddenly appeared over the skyline and elegantly landed with silent motors in front of the town. Steve did not notice this but kept on running away toward the bush, when Sancho's hoarse voice hollered: 'Hi, Steve! Steve! Come back! Here it is! Here it is!'

Steve turned. He saw the plane, and hurried back, arriving just in time to assist his wife, a very nice-looking girl, out of the cabin. When we all had feasted our eyes on the goddess, we slowly returned to our tents. The general comment was that Steve really was the lucky boy.

The Don's comment was the only critical one. He said to Sancho: 'You goddamned ass! You always have to put your foot in it! What the hell did you mean by hollering: "Here it is!"?'

After the arrival of Steve's wife the Don's sojourn in the camp was drawing to a close. Now that he could no longer swear and curse as he pleased but had to watch his tongue and modify the strength and quality of his tirades, he enjoyed himself no more. He left soon after.

The first plane after break-up had landed in a long narrow lake, beyond Beaverlodge Bay. The space for a take-off run was pretty short, and the end of the lake was blocked by a high hill. As soon as a plane was off it had to bank steeply to the right to get out

through a narrow gap. After the Don and the other passengers had boarded the plane the pilot warmed up the engine for a while and when he started he picked up considerable speed before he took off. I was told that when the craft approached the crag cliff with a speed of one hundred miles an hour, the Don suddenly half rose in his seat and yelled in terror. 'Lift 'er, Jesus! Jesus Christ, lift 'er, lift 'er!'

These, his words of farewell, were positively the mildest he had uttered during his whole stay in Beaverlodge. But then perhaps he was overcome by the solemnity of the occasion.

But I am ahead of events and must go back to the time of our return from our staking trip.

On one of the first days back I met the Boy Scout, a man of about thirty, dressed according to the Fifth Avenue idea of a well-equipped bush-man. One look told me why he had at once been nicknamed 'The Boy Scout'. On his feet he had heavy hobnailed boots, laced to the knees and weighing several pounds each. They could be relied on to exhaust a man in half an hour, if he had not already slipped with his hobnails on some smooth rock and broken his neck. Then, leaving the knees bare for mosquitoes and the thorns of briar and raspberry bushes in the burned-over surroundings, came a pair of wide khaki shorts which gave easy access for black-flies to the more sensitive parts of his anatomy. Over his shirt he had a coat of waterproof material (incidentally, perspiration proof, too) which assured a nice clammy feeling on a warm summer's day. The whole was topped by a wide-brimmed hat expressly made to be swept off the head by the first low spruce branch.

He introduced himself to me as a mining engineer and assistant to Count von A—, 'one of the foremost geologists on the continent', who was in Beaverlodge as 'the representative of powerful New York mining interests'. He said furthermore that the Count had heard that Shirley and I had staked a promising find, and would like to talk to us.

Pretending to be uninterested, and falling into the same kind of dignified jargon, I replied that I was not at all sure that we would be interested in any deal at that time or even willing to discuss our

find with outsiders, but that I would consult my partner on the matter, and would let them know what he thought.

Now the Boy Scout became insistent. He told me of the Count's great influence in financial circles and his ability to get limitless capital for a 'promising' prospect, and about his knowledge and international reputation as a scientist; we would do well to come to him first if we wanted to make a deal. About himself the Boy Scout said that he had worked in many fields both here and abroad and that he only recently had become associated with the Count. He ended by assuring me again that they could assist us in getting the right people interested in our property.

I told Jack about the meeting and about the Boy Scout's dress, which did not point to much experience in the Canadian bush, and of his claims for his partner, the Count. After some discussion we decided to take a closer look at the pair. It could not hurt, our claims were legally staked and safe. We went visiting, taking some samples along.

The Boy Scout received us cordially and introduced us to a dignified-looking, elderly gentleman whom he presented as Count von A—. The Count very politely asked us to sit down and started talking. He spoke very correct English, spiced with many quotations and French phrases, but with a strong accent. He hinted at the important interests he represented and at his connections in the world of finance. Then he asked if he could look at our samples and wanted information about the location of our find.

While he talked with Jack, the Boy Scout manœuvred me outside to show me their camping gear. It was obviously bought in the same Fifth Avenue sporting-goods store as his clothing.

Their tent was a wonder. It consisted of a lot of dark-green impregnated canvas and lengths of pipe which fitted together to make a frame. It could be raised in a jiffy if one knew how, and if one of the pipes was not lost or damaged; otherwise it could not be pitched at all. It weighed about three times more than an ordinary tent, was as hot as a back-oven when the sun shone on it, and as dark as a cellar even in daytime. Also its dimensions were such that one could neither stand or lie straight in it; it was a

masterpiece of ingenuity and a combination of the lead chambers of Venice and the torture chambers of the Spanish Inquisition.

The tent was augmented by a collapsible stove of the kind that works like a charm as long as one does not make a fire in it. After that it warps and is impossible to take apart or assemble again.

The rest of their outfit was similar; in theory unsurpassable, in reality useless. They had fallen for every 'clever' gadget ever manufactured for a greenhorn with a fat purse.

When I returned to the cabin, more doubtful than ever, the Count was still examining our samples with a strong mineral glass. He laid two of them aside and said that he had found free gold in them.

All my doubts vanished at once. I was convinced that the Count really was one of the world's great geologists, and followed the rest of his inspection with bated breath. Once when I ventured a timid question he silenced me with an imperious gesture and I lapsed back into awed muteness.

Finally he laid down his mineral glass. 'Your samples are very interesting, gentlemen. They look so rich that I think I can safely congratulate you on a mine.'

I just about jumped out of my clothes and hollered from joy. As I pounded Jack instead, the Count continued: 'I would guess that this sample will run about thirty, and this one perhaps fifteen dollars in gold.'

I gaped, impressed. Here was a real geologist! Here was a man who knew what he was talking about; he could tell how much gold there was in a rock just by looking at it through a glass. There was not another man in camp who could do that.

When we had been dismissed with a few formal phrases, we returned to our tent walking on air. Thirty dollars per ton! Fifteen dollars! Boy! We were rich!

But when darkness settled over camp and I had gone to bed I began to be doubtful again. To be able to tell how much gold there was in a rock by just looking at it was pretty darn good. In fact too darn good. Of what use were assayers if one could do that? No, something was haywire here! I said to Jack, who was almost

asleep. ‘Have you ever heard of anybody who could tell the gold content like that before, Jack?’—I haven’t.’

‘No, but he must know or he wouldn’t dare say it,’ Jack mumbled and turned over.

I was not satisfied though. Was the Count really a good geologist or just a big humbug? The outfit and the assistant suggested the latter.

The more I thought about this thing, the more I felt that something was wrong. And when we examined these events in the bright and sober light of the morning, we were sure that the whole set-up—the Count and the Boy Scout, the phony outfit and the elaborate build-up—was just a big bluff. A few questions to more experienced men about the evaluating of mineral samples made us certain.

By now I was boiling mad over the whole business—especially since I had been taken in by it—and thirsted for revenge.

My opportunity came that very day. The Boy Scout came to our tent and asked us over to the cabin. The Count, he said, wanted some more information about our property.

We complied with the request and told the Count all he wanted to know about our claims and gave him some exaggerated and optimistic views on the formations and the mineralization of the vicinity. When this subject had been discussed at length and exhausted, we drifted into other things. Asking a couple of leading questions, I induced the Count to speak of his life in the old country. He proved quite willing and told us about his childhood at home in the old family castle, stories of his schooldays and years as a cavalry officer, duels and life at the imperial court, spiced with many amusing anecdotes. His story had a distinct flavour of the romantic novels of the turn of the century. Finally he shook his head sadly and sighed. He got across the idea that his present station and this sort of work were both distasteful and beneath his dignity.

We were properly impressed and asked him to continue. Flattered by our obvious interest, he went on. We had apparently hit on his favourite subject of conversation. He expanded as he talked.

With a few more questions that showed my ignorance of the subject, I steered the talk to heraldry. Now I had hit on something that the Count really liked to talk about, and now he really got going. He was plainly gratified by an audience who knew about the existence of such things even if it showed a deplorable ignorance about them. Happily he discoursed on heraldic signs and colours, lions and leopards couchant, bars, fields and crests. In the end he produced a tie-pin, which, he said, bore the arms of his family.

I had been waiting for something like this. As I looked at the pin my suspicions were verified. I returned it and asked him how it happened that the coat-of-arms of a Count was topped by the three-pronged coronet of a lowly baronet?

The 'Count' looked a little taken aback, but asked gruffly what I knew of such things. Smiling, I pulled out my signet ring, which I had not worn because the stone was loose, and showed it to him.

The 'Count' had little to say after this, and Jack and I left. And after that the two of them also avoided us. No more invitations and no more geological discussions.

With gusto Jack told the story of our thirty-dollar gold samples, the free gold and the 'Count's' coronet around the camp. The yarn, perhaps a little embellished, was soon known by everybody. Soon the boys began to greet the 'Count' with courtly bows that they had learned from the movies, to inquire about his health and ask him to evaluate their gold samples since there was no assayer in town.

The two gentlemen now started to avoid everybody, and soon after break-up they disappeared from camp. What had been their purpose we never discovered. But whatever it was it went awry. They left as empty-handed as they had arrived.

One day Percy sent word that he wanted to see me. His company wanted to get in touch with a prospector who was camped on a large island some twenty miles east of Beaverlodge. At the same time the ice had become so poor that Percy did not want to send one of his own inexperienced crew to look for the man. Would I take the risk of going? He would pay me well for it.

It was a trip I shall never forget. The ice was now so poor—poorer even than I had expected—that one could get out on it only from the tips of the farthest points where deep cold water came right to shore. The shallow bays were open for hundreds of feet. To take the dogs was out of the question; I had to go on foot.

Only after considerable searching did I find a spot where I thought I could get out on sound ice. Having asked Jack, who had accompanied me to the starting point, to meet me at the same spot the next evening, I was off. Poking and probing with a long pole I snaked my way out over the rubbery ice and around the black, rotten spots that shook and tinkled as I passed. Sometimes walking, sometimes running, I got out on the open lake, where the ice was still good. I was wet and shaky by the time I got there.

There the danger was past. Although it was the end of May, the ice was still white and sound and more than four feet thick. Looking at the great expanse of it, it seemed that it would never melt. In fact it never would by itself. Only when a violent storm broke it and ground it to bits against the rocky shores would it disappear.

Briskly I marched on mile after mile. It was late evening when, footsore and tired, I approached the island where Dodson, the prospector, was supposed to be camped. The ice there was even worse than where I had started. On the shoreward side it was so black and full of open spots that one could not even think of trying to land. I walked around to the outer side. Even there it was so rotten that it would be a precarious business getting ashore. I looked for tongues of whiter, sounder ice and worked myself landward on these, but always I ended up on rotten stuff, that groaned and creaked underfoot, through which I could poke my pole in a few tries. Time and again I had to turn back and try again in some other place. Occasionally I yelled at the top of my voice, hoping that Dodson would hear and come out to meet me in a canoe. But there was no sign of him, nor did I see his camp. The island was a couple of miles across and he could not hear me.

Away out near the south-east corner, close to a rocky point, was a little islet, outside of which the ice appeared a little stronger.

Gingerly I worked my way closer to it until I was only fifty feet away. Before me lay a stretch of spongy stuff from which, even as I looked, little fragments were breaking loose. This was the only chance.

Holding my pole horizontal, I started running, scurrying across the last rubbery stuff, and took a long leap. I landed hip-deep in icy water. The worst was over; the narrows between the rock and the island were open and so shallow that I could easily wade across.

So I took off my clothes and went in. It was a little like crawling into a deep-freeze; I was numb and like a piece of stove-wood when I got ashore; the water in the middle of the narrows had reached my chest. But after a short run I was warm again and started out to find Dodson.

Near a little cove on the north-east shore stood a small tent. Before it burned a camp fire. I yelled and got a faint answer and a man came crawling out on his hands and knees. I hurried over. Dodson sat on the ground, ashen-faced and groaning. His left leg was swollen to the shape of a log and just as stiff. He said that it ached so that he was barely able to move or sleep. Only by creeping around had he been able to get wood and water during the past week. For more than fourteen days he had not gone far from his tent. It was an old illness which recurred occasionally, but this attack was worse than any he had ever had before. When he read the letter I had brought, he cursed aloud. 'They want me to go to Great Slave Lake, but how in hell can I go there now? It's the hospital or a wooden overcoat for me!'

He needed the help of a doctor and fast, but how could I get him to Beaverlodge over all that rotten ice? It just could not be done. The help had to come to him.

That night I looked after him as well as I could, cooked food and gathered wood, and in the morning I started on my return trip. In Dodson's canoe I paddled along the shore to the islet. On the shore nearby I cut three long poles. I laid one of these on the ice parallel to the edge and the other two as a bridge across the open water. Then I put the canoe up on the highest spot of the islet and balanced out in the ice on the poles. It was a lot poorer now than the night before, but by pushing the poles ahead one at

a time and walking on both of them in turn I slowly got across the black ice to where it was safe again. Then I hurried on toward Beaverlodge.

But when I reached the point where I had walked out the day before one look told me that no one could get ashore there any more. Two days' sun had weakened the ice near the shore to a sickly grey pulp and the open stretch nearest it was three times wider. Shirley was nowhere in sight, and when I yelled there was no reply. But I had to get ashore. Dodson needed help.

Outside the point was a small wooded island, where the adjacent ice was still sound. I got to the island without trouble and started cutting wood for a signal fire. Then I suddenly heard the chug-chug of a motor, and looked up. In the narrow channel of open water a motor-boat was slowly creeping out toward the point.

I ran out on the ice and waved and yelled. Somebody in the boat waved back. It was Jack. He was in the bow giving directions to Gus, who steered.

I cut three poles again and pulled them along toward the boat, which now was breaking ice as it came my way, until it got too thick. Gus hollered 'You'll have to get here some way, Erik. Can't get much farther. Besides, I'll get whiskers on my boat!'

Pushing the poles ahead and shifting from one to the other I negotiated the rotten stretch and was finally helped aboard the boat by Jack and Gus, who grinned pleasantly. I was tired and hungry but happy.

That night a wire was sent to McMurray, and the next day a plane landed in the open narrows north of Dodson's island. After breaking up some additional ice with canoe and explosives the plane crew made a big enough open spot for a take-off and the day following it took off with Dodson aboard. That night he was in hospital. When I saw him several months later he was well again. But it had been a near thing.

By now there was a food shortage in camp. The newcomers, many of whom arrived without provisions, bringing with them only prospecting equipment, had made big inroads into the supplies of the surrounding trading posts. A little had been brought in by plane, but during break-up even that trickle dried up.

Everybody's stores came to an end at about the same time, because those who still had supplies shared them with others until they were without themselves.

Now all sorts of things that had been discarded suddenly became usable again. Frozen eggs and potatoes, rancid butter and mouldy bacon made wonderful eating, and those who, like myself, had set their nets in the open bays and channels had to put their dogs on starvation rations to give the men food. Everybody sent orders by wire to McMurray, and waited impatiently, certain that their order would be on the first plane after break-up. There would also be mail. Our assays!

Then the expected plane came. With the first faint hum every man in camp dropped what he was doing and rushed to the lake where it landed. Jack and I joined the throng of men who expectantly crowded around the mail bags. Somebody opened them. After a while Jack waved his hand at me. He had a white envelope in it. We went aside, tore it open and eyed the letter hungrily. Jack read:

'Dear Sirs,

We have received your samples and accompanying letter of May the 3rd. The samples have been carefully examined and ...'

'Skip that crap,' I yelled. 'What's the assay?'

... and found the contents of precious minerals to be as follows:

Sample No. 1: Au. = 0.08; Ag. = 1.2 oz/ton,
,, No. 2: Au. = 0.12; Ag. = 0.7 oz/ton,
,, No. 3: Au. = trace; Ag. = 0.4 oz/ton."

Then followed the assayer's opinion that the rock looked favourable and that we should have them assayed for other minerals and that we should continue working this promising property and send more samples for assay a.s.o.

We did not look at each other. 'That wasn't bad at all; four dollars and twenty cents a ton—four-seventy with the silver—is pretty good,' I said lamely.

Jack nodded. 'I think that's really encouraging. And he says that we should keep on looking.' He pointed to the letter as we slowly walked back toward camp.

But although neither of us would admit it, the dream castles that we had built in the sky from our exaggerated hopes had tumbled down around our ears. And we ourselves, who had soared high, dreaming of riches and might, had dropped back to earth with such a thump that it still hurt. The high hopes and expectations of the past few weeks had suddenly changed into listlessness and weariness.

We sat quietly on our bunks gazing at nothing. Then Jack said with a wan smile: 'We sent out the wrong samples. The Count found free gold in those we kept.'

I did not even smile.

That night, just as I was falling asleep, Jack sat up in bed. 'You know, Erik, four dollars and seventy cents is really a damn good assay! It shows that there's something there. We just got to work to get it out. And I'm going to get together enough money to do it with, too,' he finished and hit the flat of his hand with his fist.

I did not even reply. It was the first time I had dropped down from the heights of imagined riches. It would take some days before I was back to normal again. I was not yet accustomed to it, nor as scarred and hardened as I would eventually become. It still hurt.

CHAPTER VI

WITH the first plane we also received confirmation of the stubborn rumours about gold-finds on the north shore of Great Slave Lake, near the mouth of Yellowknife River. Some of the discoveries were fabulous, the assays running into tens of ounces per ton. Free gold was said to stick right out of the hills.

The news spread like wild-fire and many prospectors, who had only waited for the rumours to become more definite, and who had found nothing around Beaverlodge, prepared to leave. There was feverish activity, which subsided when the news spread that Yellowknife was still in the middle of break-up and that no planes would get there for at least two weeks, no boats for a month.

But some of the boys started anyway by canoe, intending to go slow and prospect along the route. Among the latter were Shunsby and Brady, a couple of old-time prospectors. But they were going to look for something definite: a lost mine.

For a long time stories had circulated about somebody finding a rich gold vein on an island in Great Slave Lake, where he had been forced to seek shelter from a storm. He had taken some samples that had assayed high, but when he had returned he had been unable to find the spot again. And so the location remained a mystery.

Brady and Shunsby had been making inquiries and pored over maps all spring and had come to the conclusion that there were only two or three probable locations for the gold island, and that there was a good chance of finding it. Anyway they would try. They formed a syndicate to finance the expedition and were selling units in Beaverlodge.

A few days before their departure I met them and one of them said: 'What about investing in a gold mine, Erik?' He smiled. 'This is a sure thing, your chance to make a million.'

I smiled in return and declined. The offer was made half in jest and I did not take it seriously. If Dame Fortune had only nudged me that time! Because when I rejected the offer I also rejected untold wealth. The two companions left a few days later.

The food situation in camp became daily more serious. The planes brought some provisions, but these were so expensive that the average man could not afford them. And they were only drops in a bucket. Most people just tightened their belts another notch and waited stoically for break-up.

Then in the second week of June a storm blew up. For three days the rain pelted down like bullets on the roof and the wind whistled and howled unceasingly in the tree-tops. It tore at the tent, which flapped until I was sure it would not last the night.

The morning after the storm was calm and bright. I stepped out and looked out over the lake. The whole width of it beyond the point was no longer white but a fresh glittering blue as far as the eye could reach. 'Hey, Jack, the ice's gone!' Shirley came out too, rubbing his eyes. Now we'll soon get food, both of us thought as we looked out over the wide, open water with a feeling of release.

As early as noon a large scow thrust its broad, ugly snout around the point and headed slowly through the narrows toward Gus's wharf.

'Hot dog! A trader!' I was off on a dead run to the dock.

It came closer. In the bow stood an old acquaintance, Ali, a Syrian businessman, who for many years had toiled in Stony Rapids. As he moored the scow he smiled with his whole oily countenance. He was the first trader in town. One could almost see him rub his hands together while he wondered just how much he would be able to fleece us for his wares.

We soon found out. Everything was sky-high, so barefacedly dear that even we hardened northerners, who were used to high prices, were astounded. But if somebody complained Ali did not even stop smiling. He just shrugged: 'You tont haff to pay. I pay high price too!' And the temptation of fresh vegetables,

apples and eggs and newly smoked bacon was too much to resist. Although it smarted, we paid, and happily carried our well-filled bags to the tents.

Now we had a real feast. We stuffed ourselves with meat, potatoes at five cents apiece, fresh fruit and nuts until we could not cram down another bite. Then we lay down in the grass and smoked 'tailor-mades' and grunted from pure well-being.

'Now I don't want to look a whitefish or a trout in the face for a month,' said Jack and belched comfortably. 'Feels nice to be filled out for a change,' he continued as he rubbed his extended stomach.

While we lay there digesting in the sunshine, I heard a low clunc—clunc—clunc, and lifted my head. Out there in the narrows came the Hudson's Bay boat, pushing a big barge in front. On it came the provisions we had ordered several weeks before. The boat also brought other goods, all of which sold at reasonable prices. As soon as it landed, Ali's scow cast off and hurried away to greener pastures to be the first one at Fond du Lac.

Following closely behind the Hudson Bay boat came a whole fleet of other vessels, the flotilla we had heard about. In a steady stream they arrived, motor-boats, sailboats, rowboats, canoes, scows and barges and objects that could be called nothing but boxes. Large and small, alone and in droves, some towing or pushing others, some with motors, some with sails and some with oars. They had one thing in common, they were all loaded to the gunwales with building material, with household goods or with potatoes and other farm produce, but chiefly with people. One by one they landed at Gus's, on points in the deep bays and across the narrows.

In a few days the population of Beaverlodge was doubled and redoubled. Many of the newcomers were employees of various mining companies, who were starting up. They arrived with their supplies. Some were businessmen, who came with both building materials and stock for their shops. There were carpenters and other tradesmen, who had taken the erection of buildings on contract. There was also a sprinkling of adventurous youths, gold-bitten store clerks and schoolteachers, some professional gamblers, bootleggers and loose women, who expected to live on others.

But the majority were unemployed, looking for work. They had been drawn there by the exaggerated rumours that circulated outside of skyhigh wages and unlimited work. A great many were farmers whom drought and low grain prices had driven off the land, and who had left the prairies with their families to try their luck afresh in the North. Some were kids fresh from school, others men who had been out of work for a year or more.

All of them had one thing in common. They had no money and no way of getting it. Most of them were bitterly disappointed when they found that there was no work in Beaverlodge for people inexperienced in bushwork or mining. And even in the construction business the demand for unskilled labour was limited.

It was pitiful to see some impoverished dirt farmer sitting on the shore among his scanty household-goods, patient wife and yelling children. There was nothing for him in Beaverlodge, nor for many like him. He was beaten before he started.

The government had done their best to discourage and stop the invasion, and had persuaded many to turn back. But the most stubborn and desperate had still come, lured by the hope of a new and better life. And now there was nothing for them. Many were later sent out again at the government's expense.

Feverish activity suddenly reigned in Beaverlodge. The period of somnolent waiting was over. In a rush piles of lumber and bricks grew up on the shores, trees were cut down and the brush cleared to make room for the houses and sheds that soon began to rise everywhere. Basements were dug, stores and restaurants built, warehouses and living-quarters put up. Down by the shore, workers, naked from the waist up, built docks for boats and planes. On the hillside stone masons were constructing the brick foundation for a church. One hundred feet away rose a bakery, a little farther off a dance-and pool-hall. Steve, who already found his hotel too small, was adding an annex of logs and a second story of lumber. Every morning there was something new to see.

More boats arrived loaded and left empty; the shores teemed with people, boxes, bales and many strange things. There was the chopping of axes, hammering of sledges, the clang and clamour of chains and cables, the roar of motors and machines, and the

confusing whine of buzz-saws. Planes roared around the clock. Over forty arrived and left in one day; that was the record.

Two policemen, a representative of the provincial government and the new post-master also arrived. The two latter established themselves in a large tent, above which a muslin sign with foot-high letters read: 'Government of Saskatchewan, Dept. of Natural Resources.' A smaller one nailed to the corner of the tent-frame said: 'Post Office.'

Now we also found out that we had been given a new name. Beaverlodge, being considered too modest, had been replaced with the more bombastic *Goldfields*.

In addition to all these legitimate activities, much that shunned the daylight also got under way in short order. Within a week several combined bootlegging and gambling joints were started, where a man could buy a shot of Scotch for a 'buck', and where pale men with green celluloid visors right handily relieved him of his money. There, games of Black Jack, crap and poker operated around the clock. And in a large tent with several rooms, pitched in the outskirts, Mickey and her sisters were willing to become anybody's sweetheart for five dollars paid in advance.

The old-timers in Goldfields soon found that they needed locks for their doors and that articles of any value could no longer be left lying around in the old carefree manner. A new order had arrived.

Of the many hoaxes and swindles connected with the gold finds around Beaverlodge, that of the Magmatic Prospecting, Transportation and Development Company was perhaps the worst and certainly the drollest.

Sometime that spring an advertisement had appeared in the daily papers in Edmonton:

GOLD!

in immense quantities has been discovered on the shores of Lake Athabasca! Get in on the Groundfloor of this, the Richest Goldfield in history! THE MAGMATIC PROSPECTING, TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMPANY now offers everybody a chance to share in this Untold Wealth! . . .

The advertiser then went on to offer to transport for \$100 in cash, paid in advance, a limited number of physically and mentally sound men to the heart of the new gold district, assist them under the guidance of an 'expert geologist' to prospect, stake and record favourable ground. After all this he undertook to transport them back to Edmonton and furthermore to assist them in the sale or development of their mining properties. This latter of course at an extra charge. He ended his advertisement by saying that 'Hundreds of mining claims had been sold for \$1,000 or more apiece', and exhorted all 'progressive and forward-looking men to avail themselves of this unique opportunity to become fabulously wealthy.'

About fifty speculators replied to the advertisement and were all found to be 'physically and mentally sound'—a verdict which in the light of subsequent events must be considered exaggerated—and were sent by train to McMurray. There they were bundled into a scow together with a cook, 'the expert geologist' and some provisions. With a local breed for helmsman and machinist the scow forthwith set out on its journey down-river and toward Beaverlodge. Before their departure the entrepreneur put the 'expert geologist' in charge and waved them off. He himself would hurry ahead to Beaverlodge by plane to make all the necessary arrangements for the lodging and boarding, etc., of his crew of 'gentleman adventurers'. And that was the last they ever saw of him.

When the scow arrived in Goldfields after a week's rough voyage, during which the gold-seekers, packed like sardines in a tin, had endured all the pangs of seasickness in close quarters, the manager was not, as they had expected, on the dock to meet them. In fact nobody in Goldfields had even seen him. But the crew still believed in him and waited patiently in the scow for several days. Finally, when provisions were running low they decided to start the prospecting campaign without him.

Early one morning—a confused din had already been issuing from the scow for a couple of hours—a peculiar procession emerged and marched in Indian file slowly through the settlement and northward into the wilderness. Loaded with gear and dressed

like a movie producer's nightmare idea of pioneers, a score of goldseekers staggered along behind the expert geologist, who carried the compass. There were lads still in their teens, greybeards with bent knees and men in their prime. But all of them staggered under loads that would have made mules proud and a glance told an onlooker that all were greenhorns. Passing the gaping population they reached the fringe of the bush and disappeared one by one.

Some of the spectators shook their heads. 'They should be stopped, it's a crime to let them go out and get lost.' Ed Forrest voiced the general opinion.

Somebody laughed. 'Don't worry, Ed. They won't get far enough with those loads to get lost, and they'd go even if you tried to stop them. You'll see them back though in a couple of hours, I bet!'

He was right. In less than one hour the first of the prospectors staggered back exhausted, and during the remainder of the forenoon the rest followed. The prospecting and staking trip was over, and the men sat down to await developments. After that they did not stir from their scow.

Only when a few more days had passed and all their supplies were gone did it become obvious, even to the most gullible, that they had been taken for a ride. Many had by then already started to look for work or ways to get back to Edmonton. The police instituted a search for the smart organizer, but I do not know if they ever caught him.

So we had been civilized and had found a new population and a new name. Officially we were now the 'Hamlet of Goldfields' and not just a camp of prospectors, who were now in fact hard to find in the crowd of newcomers. Most of the prospectors were now out on their claims, or had left for greener fields, such as Yellowknife.

Not only in town but also in nearby camps there was intense activity. Consolidated Mining and Smelting, who had the earliest start, were building new bunk-houses and other permanent buildings, and were constructing docks and roads and hangars for their planes. They had also started to sink a shaft.

Athona, too, was putting up buildings and expanding its development work. Half-a-dozen other companies and scores of prospectors were working their ground, some with crews of men, some alone.

In the middle of all this bustle Jack Shirley left for Regina, true to his decision to try to raise capital for developing our claims.

While waiting for break-up, I had started building a cabin. But before it was half finished logs began to get scarce. When I had carried some on my shoulder for the better part of a mile, I decided that that was not the way and went to a spot a few miles along the lake-shore to cut enough to finish the place with. When I had felled what I considered a sufficient number of logs, and gathered them into a raft in a sheltered bay, I got Gus to tow them in to Goldfields with his boat.

Late one calm and sunny evening we were slowly going across Beaverlodge Bay with our log raft behind, when Gus pointed with his pipestem to Beaverlodge Island and asked:

'Have you seen the hole on the island, Erik?'

'No. What hole?' I asked.

'I'll show you,' Gus replied and steered toward shore. After we had made fast he led the way up the hill-side. There in a flat rock outcrop, a few hundred feet from the shore, gaped a square vertical hole, about eight feet deep and maybe seven across. From the bottom of this a tunnel sloped downward and disappeared in the darkness. It was only three feet high at the mouth but increased somewhat in size farther down.

We got down to the bottom of the hole and peered into the tunnel. There was still some ice, forming a glassy slide which disappeared out of sight. Gus took a rock and threw it in. It rolled down and down, making a hollow muted rumble, ending in a faint splash.

'Well, I'll be darned! How did that hole get there?' I asked.

'Hm. Many have asked the same question before you. Some think it's an old mine shaft, but it's probably made by water, I'd say. I've seen others, but smaller, over on Crackingstone Point. But the Indians have a story about it.'

And as we continued to tow our raft homeward Gus told me the tale:

'Once, very long ago, just after the Great Spirit had created everything, filled the woods with game and the waters with fish, lived a huge beaver. It was bigger than the biggest buffalo, its tail was like an outspread moose hide, and when it hit the water it was like thunder. The beaver lived in the west end of Lake Athabaska, where it dammed up the water at the spot where Fitzgerald now stands and created the falls there. The water backed up and enlarged the lake, flooded the whole country and created the marshes around the mouth of the river. The beaver also cut down all the timber, and still today you find nothing but willows and alders growing in the delta and bare sand-plains along the south shore.'

'The humans got angry at the beaver for spoiling their grounds, and one mighty hunter swore to capture and kill it. But before he had time to do so the beaver escaped to Beaverlodge Lake. There it built itself a new lodge, so big and strong that nobody could break it down—you can still see it, it's Beaverlodge Mountain—and dammed up the lake at the portage. You can still see by the shape of the sand-ridge there that it had once been a beaver dam.'

'But the hunter did not give up. He soon found the beaver's hideout and one day he surprised it out on the lake, cutting off its retreat to the house. The beaver was now forced to flee. It went over the dam, followed by the hunter, and ashore on Beaverlodge Island. There it quickly dug a tunnel down into the ground and way out under the lake. From there it dived so far that it was almost out of the hunter's sight when it came up on the surface. But the hunter discovered it and resumed the chase. He finally caught up with it on the south shore near Point Cipri and killed it. Even today you can still see the red blood flow out of the sand there as proof that this story is true. And he who still doesn't believe it needs only to look at Beaverlodge Mountain and the hole on the island to be convinced.'

Now that I had logs again, the work on my cabin progressed rapidly. One sunny afternoon, as I was standing on the roof and nailing down tar-paper, a funny little man stopped and watched

me critically, his sharp nose in the air and his light-blue eyes staring straight at me. Abruptly he asked: 'Are you a carpenter? Can you build a house? I need a man who knows the bush, do you want work?'

I stopped whistling and laid down my hammer and looked down at him surprised. He continued to stare. Then I said: 'Well, I built this, and I've lived around here a few years. What do you pay?'

'One hundred and twenty-five a month and everything found,' was the reply. Short and to the point.

'O.K. When do I start?' I could play this game too.

'Be at the dock tomorrow about noon when the Junker brings our equipment. You can start then.'

And so I was working for Goldshore Mines Ltd., which owned a large group of claims near town. Why, I have never been able to figure out, because I already had a job with C.M. & S. and was to start working as soon as my cabin was finished. Perhaps it was because the little man intrigued me, or just from some quirk.

I worked there all summer. To begin with we constructed buildings and tent frames, but soon after we started trenching, and I had to exchange my axe for an eight-pound drill hammer. There were several good-looking porphyry lenses on the property and we blasted prospect trenches across these, one hundred feet apart, to find out their width and grade. Although many of the assays were good, after three weeks of drilling and blasting we had still not found any free gold. As free gold is a shot in the arm for any prospect and a great booster of the values of a gold stock, 'Mr. Miller', the manager, the same man who had hired me, promised a cash bonus to the first man to find some.

In this land almost chemically free of Misters, 'Mr. Miller' had acquired the title as a joke, because he carried his five foot two with a straight-backed strut, always kept his features folded in important and dignified wrinkles, and obviously had an exaggerated opinion of his own importance.

One afternoon loud yells were heard from one of the trenches where a blast had just been set off. Fearing that an accident had occurred, my workmate and I laid down our tools and hurried

there at top speed. Instead we found the men pounding the rocks like mad.

'Look, free gold, Erik!' Van Humpback held out a piece of quartz. In the middle of it was a nugget, the size of a pea. After that there was no more drilling that afternoon. Everybody rooted around in the trench and knocked rocks apart. It was an hour before anybody remembered to run to camp to tell 'Mr. Miller'.

The two happy discoverers got their bonus, and their suggestion that it should be invested in beer in Goldfields was accepted with acclamation.

And so that night after work a merry crowd marched off to a little tent at the outskirts of Goldfields, where a certain Tom was selling home-brewed beer. There we bought a whole flock of bottles, which were carried off a little way into the bush. And the feast began. Sitting in a ring on stones and tree-stumps or fallen logs, we caroused, told stories and sang. And while the songs got louder and the laughs more boisterous, the trips to Tom's became more frequent. The bonus money was soon gone but that did not slow down the party. It just got noisier.

It was nearly midnight and getting quite dusky when again it was my turn to go for a refill. I tottered off to the tent. But it was empty. There was no beer and no Tom. I waited awhile. Then I remembered that Tom used to put a few bottles in a muskeg spring to keep them cool. I went there and started to feel around in the spring. Sure enough, there were several bottles there. I took them all, poked around in the water with a stick to make sure I had not missed any, and tacked back to my impatiently waiting pals with the sad news that these bottles that I brought were the last ones to be had. Thus the party ended a while later and we all went home to bed.

A few days later I met Tom again and told him that I owed him for eight bottles of brew. When he asked me how come, I explained. To my amazement he almost hugged me and, pulling me forthwith into the tent, opened another. He told me to forget about the money I owed and opened one more. Now I became really puzzled and was getting a little suspicious too.

Tom explained. It seems that the same night that we had our

free-gold party the policeman had paid Tom an unexpected visit in his official capacity. He had carefully examined the cabin in which Tom lived, turned over everything in the tent, poked into the wood-pile and even looked under the floor. But Tom was not worried; he knew there was not a bottle in the house and blessed the party that had consumed all he had. But then the policeman—who was obviously well informed—walked over to the spring, and Tom nearly died from heart failure. He had forgotten about the bottles there. Fearfully he watched the policeman probe around in the well with a long stick. He was even more surprised than the constable, but not as disappointed, when no beer turned up there either. His mouth was still open when his visitor left, a bit disgruntled. What had happened to the beer in the cache? That had worried him all week.

In all innocence I had come along and lifted the evidence just while the law was searching Tom's house!

I did not pay for any beer that night either.

A few nights later, when I again came in to Goldfields after work, I found a group of men talking excitedly down at the dock, where a plane had just landed.

'What's all the hullabaloo about?' I inquired.

'Shunsby and Brady have made a gold find on some island in Great Slave Lake,' somebody replied. 'Harry Heather just came in from Resolution with the news.'

I found Harry in the restaurant over a cup of coffee. From him I got the story.

A couple of weeks after their departure from Goldfields, Brady and Shunsby came to Fort Resolution at the mouth of Great Slave River. There they stopped only long enough to replenish their supply of provisions before resuming their trip—apparently to Yellowknife—but actually to search for that gold-bearing island in the lake.

About thirty miles north-east of Resolution lies an isolated group of islets where travellers going east and north usually stop for lunch or rest. Shunsby and Brady also stopped there in a little cove, where they found the still smoking campfire of some other party, which had just departed. Since this was one of the spots

they had intended to examine, Brady started prospecting in the vicinity, while Shunsby laid more wood on the fire and began making lunch.

Brady walked along studying the rocks and knocked loose a quartz chip, glanced at it absentmindedly and was about to throw it away when something gleaming caught his eye. A speck of free gold, the size of a flax seed, protruded from the rock! He stared. Then he yelled.

Now lunch was forgotten. The two partners scrambled back and forth, pounding away at every quartz vein they saw and finding more and more gold-bearing veins. In a few days they staked the whole group of islands. No rush followed the find, because the Outpost Islands lie a good ten miles from the nearest land. Shunsby and Brady had the whole thing to themselves, a real 'corner'.

That was the start of Great Slave Lake Gold Mines.

The tragicomic point to the story is that the Outpost Islands, ever since white people started travelling on the lake, have been a halting place. Many of the sourdoughs of '98 on their way to the Yukon, the majority of the prospectors bound for Yellowknife by boat, and the men going east had camped there. The islands had also provided shelter in a storm for many a boat.

When Shunsby and Brady left Goldfields in June they were selling units in their syndicate for \$200. In August these same units brought from \$50,000 to \$70,000 each. And so riches had again passed me by when I turned down their offer, and I was still working for Goldshore Mines.

Miller, the boss for the outfit, was a peculiar little figure. Before he was sent to Goldfields to run the Goldshore camp, he had worked in a laboratory in the East and lived a sheltered existence, pampered by a widowed mother and three spinster sisters. Accustomed to the conservative habits of Upper Canada, he was lost and bewildered in the free and easy-going West, where no-one stood on ceremony.

He started and glowered when somebody amicably called him by his first name—or worse yet, by its diminutive, Art—and pulled up his five-foot-two frame to ramrod stiffness. He treated his

crew either with a commanding brusqueness, which made them bristle, or with an ingratiating familiarity, which they detested. The middle way, a casual friendliness, which showed that he liked and appreciated them for what they were, he never learned.

Besides not knowing how to treat his men, he was also completely ignorant of how much work to expect from them. And although he was inordinately proud of his degree and, like many little men, very finicky about his dignity, he had no appreciation of workmanship. He had never before handled a big camp, and the provisioning of it seemed too big a job for him. He never ordered enough food at a time and therefore was always in hot water with the cook. He scurried among other camps trying to borrow one thing or another. And the crew was forever grumbling over the lack of something. How a man like him had been sent to run a mining camp in the primitive wilderness was a riddle to everyone in Goldfields. But his mishaps and blunders provided us with unending amusement.

Nevertheless, he was a nice man at heart, and although some said it was too deep ever to show on the surface, I think they were wrong. He was really quite bashful, but hid it under a brusque manner. I am sure that in his former sheltered existence an oath had never passed his lips, because the first time I ever heard him try one, he looked scared, as if expecting a bolt from above to smite him on the spot, but at the same time proud because it really had sounded like a curse. But he was learning, and by fall he had become quite proficient.

His total lack of appreciation of craftsmanship once put me in a very embarrassing position, though it proved to be a blessing later.

One day 'Mr. Miller' stopped where I was working and suddenly asked: 'Erik, can you sharpen steel?' When I shook my head he said: 'I wish you would learn, we'll soon need another steel-sharpener. You can help the blacksmith sometime and pick it up from him.' Whereupon he departed.

Grinning, I told the blacksmith about it that night and added: 'You better teach me after supper or else. And better look to your job too or I'll soon have it.'

Everybody laughed. The whole crew regarded this latest brain-wave of Miller's as a huge joke. Steel-sharpening is a pretty difficult craft, and a drill smith commanded good pay and was held in high regard in the mining camps. It was a trade which took years to learn. But, except for joking remarks, the whole thing was soon forgotten for other and worse whims.

Not by Miller, however. One day, weeks later, when I was working with a gang on a group of claims some miles from the main camp, our blacksmith suddenly quit, and no replacement was to be had. 'Mr. Miller' came to me and said: 'You'll have to start sharpening steel now, Erik.'

Now I was really in a fix. Except that all of us had occasionally helped the blacksmith, none of the crew knew anything about steel-sharpening. They all declined: 'It's your baby, Erik. You're looking after this job, and he told you to do it. Now go ahead!'

There was no help or sympathy to be had there. Nothing remained but to start trying. I had watched the smith enough times to remember a little about how he sharpened the drills and what colour he gave them when he tempered them. I went ahead and when I had formed a few tolerable ones I tried to heat them to the colour I remembered, dipped them in the liquid and carried them out to the boys.

I stood beside them in trepidation when they tried out the steels. To everybody's undisguised amazement they stood up fine. Pete said: 'Heck, these are better than Van's!' I just shrugged my shoulders superciliously and said airily: 'Nothing to it. My great-grandfather was a blacksmith. I guess I have it in my blood.' I turned and marched off to camp, where I proudly resumed my work. When the gang went out the next morning they had a big bundle of my newly sharpened drills with them.

A scant half-hour later, when I was busy in the smithy, there was a horrible rattle outside. Pete had thrown a bunch of steels on the ground and said drily: 'Here's something for your great-great-grandpa—your steels aren't worth a hoot in hell!'

Now started a period of suffering. I sharpened and tempered steel from morning until night without ever getting them right. Either they were so hard that they sprang to pieces with the first

blow of the hammer or so soft that the point curled up and looked like a sickly mushroom after rain. Or they just broke. After the first day's lucky fluke I just could not give them the right temper.

The boys carried loads of drills to and from the smithy with ever louder jeers and I received so many jibes and derogatory remarks about me and my great-grandfather that I wished I had never heard about him. And while I sweated and swore, I was becoming more and more anxious about what 'Mr. Miller' would say when he found that nothing had been accomplished for a week.

Suddenly a few drills became serviceable, then a few more. And an occasional one was just right. Slowly I began to learn how it should be done, and the job started progressing again. I drew a deep sigh of relief.

Luckily 'Mr. Miller' did not come around until the worst was over, and when he did come he did not even notice that the past week's achievement had been practically nil. Thus I was left alone to my experimenting and slowly developed into a tolerable steel-sharpener, something that was to be of great use to me later.

In the evenings I still worked on my cabin in Goldfields. It soon became evident that having a place there was a good idea, because it was turning into a real town. The outlines of streets and wooden sidewalks were emerging, and stores, barbershops, restaurants and dwellings grew up.

One night, when I walked through our 'business district', the radio man came running out of his office waving a yellow slip of paper: 'Hi, Erik, here's a wire for you!'

It was from Jack Shirley: 'Wire if accept \$4,000 for half your interest in Regina group.'

Four thousand dollars! I immediately wired my acceptance and walked home in the clouds, wondering what I should do with all that money. I was on my way. This was the first step toward wealth and might. And as I waited for an explanatory letter from Jack, I could hardly contain myself or keep from quitting my job. While I forged drill bits I also formed extravagant plans for the future.

When the letter came I found that Jack and I had sold half of our interest in our claims to a brand-new company, Regina Gold Mines Ltd., for \$8,000. But the catch was, that all the money was to be spent on prospecting and developing the property. In other words, no wealth for me, not even a cent, except in wages, if I wished to work for the company.

Still, I would be working for myself there. If the property proved valuable I would also own a quarter interest in it. There was still a chance to become rich.

Jack also wrote that he would return to Goldfields as soon as all arrangements were completed, in a couple of weeks. While I waited I bought a sturdy boat and a strong outboard engine. We would need these when we wanted to travel between Goldfields and our claims in the dirty autumn weather.

Then Jack arrived and I quit my job. Now we were going to work on our own ground and make ourselves a mine. Dame Fortune again beckoned at the horizon.

CHAPTER VII

ALL summer and fall we worked—three men on the claims. Three, because Jack had brought along a young man from Regina, the son of one of our backers. He was cook and man of all work, leaving Jack and me free to spend our time on drilling and blasting.

After erecting a tent camp we systematically trenched and sampled the porphyry lenses from which we had previously obtained gold values, and blasted test pits in other rusty outcrops besides. About once a week we took our samples to the C.M. & S., who assayed them in exchange for a ‘first chance’ at the property if it proved up.

Our results varied. Mostly the assays were so poor that we were forced to abandon several lenses which in the beginning had looked promising. Eventually there remained only one lens, the biggest, where the values, although far below ore grade, were persistent. And occasionally, just as we began losing hope even there, we received another good assay which spurred us on to renewed exertions.

But our backers in Regina could not understand why we had not yet found them a mine. Shirley had hardly been out there a week before the first impatient letter arrived, asking what we were doing, and why he had not sent them any reports. In spite of repeated explanations that we had barely started, and that trenching was hard and slow work, and that gold mines did not grow on trees, their tone did not change. It was plain that our directors knew little about mining.

Such was the state of things when I made my weekly trip to Goldfields with samples and to buy supplies.

As I tied up at the dock, a group of men, who had been

excitedly discussing something or other, turned and greeted me with sunny smiles and broad grins.

'Oh, here's Erik,' somebody exclaimed, and somebody else asked solicitously: 'And how's the prospector? How's the mine coming on?'

'So so, not too hot,' I replied as I jumped out of the boat.

[This commonplace answer was to my surprise greeted with great glee and shouts from the boys. Many of them were old friends; there were only one or two whom I did not know. They formed a circle around me, and Tom said to them: 'Meet Big Erik, the mighty trapper and prospector from Sucker Bay.'

This was greeted with more laughs. I was puzzled, but I was also getting a bit hot under the collar at this treatment and must have shown it, because Bill asked quickly:

'Haven't you heard the news? They've found gold in Sucker Bay.'

'In Sucker Bay!' I almost shouted, and they all laughed again. 'Yes, right at the doorstep of your cabin.'

'Uhuh,' added Tom. 'He left the spot where the gold was and came here—to Goldfields! A regular Wrong-way Corrigan he is.'

I hardly listened to the new jibe. Sucker Bay! That was news! A whole year I had lived there, hunted and trapped and walked criss-cross over the hills and the surrounding bush. I knew the vicinity like the palm of my hand. And now they had found gold there, gold that had lain right under my nose all that time. And how it had come about I was told during the next few minutes.

A couple of prospectors, Coldwell and Duffy, had during the summer worked along the lake shore east of Goldfields until they made their first rich gold find on an island in the mouth of Sucker Bay. And in the vicinity they uncovered several more rich veins on points and other islands. They had then staked the richest ones, come to Goldfields to record, and let their friends in on the secret. These had started for the find a few days before. Only today had the secret become generally known. Several boat-loads of men had already started eastward and many more were feverishly preparing to leave. The rush had begun.

I was told this and much more with appropriate comments. The boys really had a field day rubbing it in. Apparently gold had been found everywhere there; in the hills I had walked over, on the points where I had set my traps, even in the flat rock in front of my cabin, where I had built my fish stage and dried my nets. Free gold was sticking out of a quartz vein there so that I could have seen it if I had just stooped down. The fact that at that time I could not have distinguished gold from brass was scant consolation now, when I stood in the middle of the ridiculing gang. They seldom had an opportunity like this and they were making the most of it.

'Now I know where Sucker Bay got the name,' said one, and that was true too. I was the sucker from Sucker Bay.

'Yes, and threw away his handbook on prospecting. Knew it all by then. Didn't need any books any more.'

'And left his rubbers sitting on top of the richest vein in the country. Not to speak of what else he might have done on it.'

It was probably the bitterest moment of my life. And there was nothing I would do but smile like a lynx and take it, or I would never hear the last of it. I felt more like taking a swipe at the whole flock of them and then sitting down to cry and curse at the top of my voice.

I was still seething when I escaped. I would show them yet. It was not too late to get in on it.

In this frame of mind I walked through town and met Pete Larson, a friend, a trapper and prospector too. He stopped and asked: 'Hello, Erik. Have you heard about Sucker Bay?'

I swore heartily and long. Pete listened until I had finished. Then he said soberly: 'I was going down there, but my boat's no good for a trip like that. You have a good boat and know the country too. Why don't we go together? It's not too late yet. Only a score of fellows have left by boat, and there haven't been any planes flying at all since the news broke. The way it's been blowing I don't think many of them have been able to travel. What do you say?'

I agreed on the spot. We decided to start the next morning and hurried home to make our preparations.

This was not the first time that finds had been made in the Sucker Bay area. Sometime in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a factor of the Hudson's Bay post in Fond du Lac had found a large gold nugget. It was large enough to make a brooch and ring for his Indian wife. But although he searched for many years he never found more, and he never disclosed the location to anybody. His grandson, who told me about it—years before Old Gus found gold in Beaverlodge—only knew that it was on the north shore of the lake, about one day's travel east and inland from Fond du Lac.

It was also rumoured at that time that some Indians had brought 'a medicine bottle full' of gold to the priest in Fond du Lac. He had thrown it in the lake and entreated them never to tell other white men about it, because they would then overrun the country and spoil it for the Indians for all time. A very sage prophecy!

Some years later an old-time Yukon prospector named Piche appeared in Edmonton with samples of gold-bearing quartz, which, he claimed, came from the east end of Lake Athabasca. When he tried to interest people in the find, they laughed at him. There could be no gold in that country; the rocks were too old. Bitter and downhearted, he finally left the city, resolved to go back and prove that he was right. On the way he went ashore on an island near Fort Chipewyan. What really happened there nobody will ever know, but there was a terrific explosion and all that was found of Piche was a few shreds of bloody clothing and a shoe in the trees surrounding the camp-site. One could only guess, and most people believed that he had sat down on a case of dynamite with a lighted fuse attached.

Piche also took his secret with him. His friends in Edmonton, who had had some of his samples assayed, discovered too late that they ran several ounces in gold. Another mine had been lost.

A few years later nickel was found in Sucker Bay. An Englishman by the name of Dardier, backed by British interests, came down and started an intensive campaign of exploration. The railway to Fort MacMurray was not yet built and all the supplies had to be brought by ox-team to Athabasca Landing, whence they were taken through falls and rapids in scows to Lake

Athabaska and on to Sucker Bay. At least a score of scows loaded with provisions, machinery, building material and other supplies arrived on the property. The camp was erected on an island in the mouth of the bay. The scows themselves were taken apart and used for the building of bunkhouses, sheds, cookery and office buildings. The camp was well equipped.

Dardier started an energetic exploration programme. Trenches were blasted and a steam-driven shot-drill was probing the formations. It was later replaced by a diamond drill and holes were forced deep into the ore-bodies. The newspapers in the outside world told glowing stories about the new rich nickel finds of Lake Athabaska.

Then in 1916 the work was suddenly stopped, apparently without reason. Dardier and his crew left, taking only their personal belongings with them and leaving a caretaker to look after the property, the brimful warehouses, the piles of oil and gas drums, and the storehouses loaded with supplies and machinery.

When a year had gone by without any word from Dardier or the company, the caretaker sold enough stuff from the warehouses to pay for his wages and also left the camp. For a while it stood abandoned with all its good and useful things. Then the local people started pilfering a little. To begin with they took only small things, but as the owner remained silent they became bolder.

A golden era started. The store-rooms were emptied of their treasures of food and clothing, the gas drums and coal-oil barrels were towed away and hidden in the woods along the lake. The engines, boats, machines and tools vanished likewise. Finally even the houses were torn down, to reappear as fine dwellings of prime lumber in nearby settlements. Soon only things too big to be moved or of no possible value to the local folk remained on 'Dardier's Island' with the stone foundations of the buildings.

Eighteen years later I found the remains of a canoe and a disintegrating packing-case full of rusty tools, covered with brush, hundreds of feet from the shore. Some marauder had cached them there and either forgotten them or been unable to find them again. Some of the inhabitants were at that time still running their outboard engines with gas from the camp and oldtimers sighed when

they remembered those years of plenty following Dardier's departure.

Many years later a plausible explanation was given to the riddle of the sudden cessation of the work. The whole thing, the story goes, had simply been a hoax.

At the outbreak of the first war nickel was in strong demand and the world's supply was controlled by certain interests who could set the price at their will.

A British armament firm, who consumed large quantities of the metal and considered the price too high, was casting about for ways of lowering it when it heard about the Athabasca showings and sent Dardier there to develop them. Whether there really was nickel or not was of little interest to the armament people as long as the reports issuing from the property were sufficiently good to make sensational news. They hoped to use this news as a lever to make the nickel producers lower their price. In this they succeeded. After a contract had been signed, by which nickel would be delivered to them at a greatly reduced price for several years ahead, the work at Sucker Bay was promptly stopped and Dardier called away.

What equipment remained did not concern the company. Its cost was small compared to the saving effected by the reduction in the price of nickel by just a few cents per pound. Today only the big boilers, which are resting on the shore, testify to a departed, glorious past. Since then Sucker Bay had slept. The year I lived there only bears and foxes contested my ownership of it. My nearest neighbour lived many miles away.

Because I had heard that the place was favourable for minerals I got hold of a manual on prospecting. The book had once belonged to Dardier. On the flyleaf was his name and 'Victoria 1914'. This book I studied in idle moments, but found nothing with its aid, and when I moved away the handbook was forgotten on a shelf in the cabin until Caldwell found it there some years later.

The night before I was to leave I could hardly sleep. My thoughts were circling constantly around Sucker Bay. How many men had already gone there from Goldfields? And how many more from other places? Would there be any good ground left

when Pete and I arrived, or would we just have to 'tie on' to some good property in the hope of finding something on it later? Was it old McFredie's mine they had found or maybe Piche's? Why had I not looked around closer while I lived there? At the same time I tried to remember all I could about the place and what I had seen there. All these thoughts and worries kept sleep away, but they also changed my craving to 'show those guys something' into real gold fever.

The next morning Pete Larson and I started out in the teeth of a raging October storm. The wind, which had calmed the day before, after having blown hard from the southwest for several days, had turned northeast during the night. But it blew just as hard, bringing rain, sleet and snow from the Barren Lands.

But my boat was sturdy and could take it. It was built from oak, a lifeboat from a wrecked lake steamer, broad of beam and twenty feet long, as seaworthy as anything that floated on the lake. It would stand any seas that heaved, even on its widest parts. Its fault was a pointed stern which forced me to attach my motor to a rack behind the stern—an outboard in the true sense of the word. When waves ran high, one would sometimes wash over the engine, drowning out the carburettor. Then I would have to lift off the engine and clean it before it ran again.

We decided to take Pete's engine with us too, so that we could change it if mine stopped. This proved a very smart move. Several times we had to cross wide, open reaches where huge swells, built up by the last storm, heaved in from the west and met the new frothing waves from the north. They gave birth to steep, choppy, cross-seas that tossed the boat around like a chip of bark and washed over the engine, which naturally stopped.

This forced us to change motors at intervals. It was a miracle that we did not drop one in the lake, when, balancing over the icy, slippery stern, we hung with head and shoulders outside the rail to swing the motors in and out. The boat pitched and hopped like a steer. As the wind got worse, both of us were busy. While one steered the other was fully occupied cleaning the carburettor on his 'kicker'. At times we did not even get one working before the other quit.

Towards noon the storm increased in violence and the rain turned into a blizzard. The snow whipped at us horizontally. It was so thick that at times we saw neither land nor clouds. Together with the spray which blew over us, it formed a slippery coating over everything in the boat. It grew darker. The lightest things were the snow-covered seats and the combers that hissed past. We were steering by the wind and the waves—our little compass did not function.

Straining to see through the white-flecked mist, we steered on. A stony shoal with boiling waves breaking over it, tossing spray against the clouds, dived right at us out of the murk dead ahead. Pete, who held the rudder, quickly threw it over. The boat started slowly heading away from the danger. Then a great roller swamped the engine. It coughed and stopped cold.

We had only just changed engines and I was still cleaning mine. Feverishly I screwed and dried with fingers numb from cold, while every breaker from the west threw us several feet nearer the shoal over which the swells now pitched in howling madness, hurling foam high into the air. The thunder of the water was fearlessly loud and near now that the motor was silent. Beyond the nearest shoal I glimpsed others and during lulls their roar came to us threatening and loud. The poor visibility had caused us to steer right into a mile-wide maze of rocks and shoals which lay in the middle of a bight; a place that everybody shied away from even in good weather.

Pete grabbed the oars but could hardly budge the heavy boat. Heaving with every swell it drifted inexorably toward the rocks.

I got the last nut in place, flung the motor over the rail and screwed it on the rack. As I pulled the cord with a prayer, I glimpsed something white moving. The engine coughed, caught and started. At half speed, the boat climbed up one comber and down again and up another and slowly out farther away. When I finally dared take my eyes off the engine the shoal was a hundred feet away. Pete was a snow-covered statue, white fingers gripping the seat. When we had slowly and unsurely drawn away, I sighed deeply. I was suddenly tired.

Neither of us spoke a word. Then Pete started fixing his engine.

Finally Pete observed: 'You can bet your boots there isn't another foolish soul on the lake today'

I nodded happily. It was a cheering thought. The storm would keep most of the other gold hunters, in their flimsy flat-bottomed skiffs, landbound. There were not many boats on the lake able to cope with weather like this. We had a head-start on our rivals.

Late in the afternoon a familiar landmark emerged from the mist. It was Jackfish Point, where the lake became narrower. After this we had only sheltered waters ahead, the worst was past.

It also cleared soon after, so that we could continue after dark. We passed Fond du Lac. The moon painted the church spire and roofs of the settlement white and pretty like a Christmas card. The scattered lights shone with a homey orange colour as we passed, negotiating the last miles to Sucker Bay.

The clock showed nearly midnight when we landed at the shore by my cabin. There were two boats drawn up on the grass, and the cabin was full of tired men, who were angry at being disturbed in the middle of the night. They protested loudly when we started moving in our gear. The cabin was full, they said, there was no room for us. 'You stay out, we were here first! Pitch your tent outside,' a grouchy voice ordered.

When I declared emphatically that the cabin was mine and that I certainly was not going out in the cold to leave a bunch of squatters in possession of it, and that some of the gentlemen present would have to move out instead, there was suddenly room for two more on the floor. So we wedged ourselves in among the others, and were soon asleep.

At the breakfast table the spirit was entirely different. Everybody was rested and pleasant and the gold-seekers who had arrived earlier gave us all the information we wanted about the field. The gold occurred together with arseno-pyrite only in quartz veins and their schistose wall rock, that crossed the norite and quartzite formation, usually in or near faults or breaks. Quartz with a rosy colour and sugary texture was especially favourable. Veins which were a milky blue following formation of apparently the same age were worthless.

The rich quartz-veins were often quite narrow and sometimes

consisted of almost pure arseno-pyrite. The values were spotty. Barren spots alternated with bunches and pockets of free gold that ran to tens of ounces in gold. Often a schistose seam could be followed for some length until it widened to a gold vein.

We were also shown a sketch map of the area on which the tracts of land staked or in the process of being staked had been marked. The majority of the men had not taken time to prospect their ground but were 'tying on' to known finds. Winter was almost upon us and they were afraid of being frozen in.

While the others were talking and preparing for their work I was concentrating. I tried to remember where on my wanderings I had seen quartz veins in the vicinity. I remembered a few, but they were on ground already staked, judging from the map.

Then, suddenly I remembered. A spring day some years earlier, when I was hunting beaver several miles inland, I had walked through a deep narrow valley with my dogs. I had seen two large quartz-veins on a bare hillside. Both of them were wide and roughly parallel and about one hundred feet apart. The quartz was full of little rust spots and even the rock around them was rusty red. As far as I could recollect they were striking north. As the formation here at least was running east, they must be running across it!

At that time I had put a few chips of quartz in my pocket. But during the night, when I was bedded down by the shore of a little lake nearby, the rocks chafed my hip, and I took them out of my pocket and laid them beside my bed. In the morning I had forgotten them. I had never returned to the spot since.

I almost crawled out of my clothes at the thought. As soon as I could I called Pete aside. He became interested at once, and we decided to go out there that morning. It was a long walk and we would have to stay out there overnight. Half an hour later we struggled northward through the bush with big loads on our backs and our hearts full of hope.

Our progress was slow. The terrain was very rugged and partly covered by an old burn. We had to climb over countless steep hills, ford creeks and walk around the ends of long narrow lakes that all lay east-west at right angles to our course.

Further north it got tougher yet. Bushfires had raged there years before and destroyed the vegetation as far as one could see. Wind and storm had afterwards thrown the big spruce and poplars criss-cross over each other into man-high tangles. With their scraggy roots they formed disordered piles and windrows over which we had to climb, while among the stacks of blackened logs were second-growth poplar, birch and raspberry vines, which cut down our vision to a few feet, and tore our clothes. We could not tell where the going was the easiest; we just had to 'bulldog' through, climbing and clambering over logs and down again, on and on.

Our goal was only eight miles in a straight line from the cabin, but it was already late afternoon when, dog-tired and perspiring, with our arms and knees aching and trembling from the incessant climbing, we reached the top of a ridge and saw the valley ahead. We sat down on the edge of the cliff for a rest. We gazed at the landscape, which, burnt and doleful and black, stretched out before us to the horizon. Only an odd patch of green timber on some sheltered point or in a swamp had escaped destruction. The fire-blackened spruce skeletons on the far hills were silhouetted against the sky like dirty stubble on an unshaven face.

But across the valley on a sloping hill two white ribbons shone among the scattered trees. My quartz veins!

We continued and were soon there, panting. My memory had not tricked me. The veins were as big as I remembered and they struck north. We knocked and scraped and broke loose large chunks of rock, but save for odd crystals of pyrite, which caused rust spots, the quartz was barren. It was genuine, compact 'bull quartz'. We were very disappointed but continued to prospect the vicinity. Signs pointed to a great fault in the valley, and schist, rusty zones and veins were abundant. We sampled numerous other veins, but except for pyrite they were all equally 'hungry looking'.

When we camped for the night, we agreed not to waste any more time on these parts, but to return to the cabin. If any of the samples we had taken 'kicked' there was time enough to come back. Here in the heart of the wilderness the veins would be safe against discovery until spring.

In a small grove of spruce, which had escaped the big fire, we stretched out our tarpaulin for a lean-to, and built a fire in front. But we did not sleep much that night, for the storm had strengthened and snow was falling again. The wind howled and tore at the tree tops and blew sleet and ashes and embers from our camp-fire over us. Cold and shivering we turned first one side then the other to the fire, or sat side by side and stared moodily into it. When daylight broke we were ready and happy to leave. Briskly we set off for the cabin.

But the storm was also our ally. It had effectively kept other prospectors from Sucker Bay. Not a single boatload had arrived while we had been absent, they were obviously still windbound. And the fellows who had finished their staking were still waiting for better weather to return to Goldfields.

We had a few days' respite and tried to use it to advantage. From morning to night we prospected the hills near the lake.

One night Pete came home very late. He was hardly inside before he laid several samples on the table. I grabbed one. It was really good-looking quartz of just the right texture and well mineralized with arseno-pyrite. When I had admired it and its fellows, Pete, after a look to make sure nobody was around, pulled a small fragment from his pocket. He pointed. Out of the smooth surface projected a little yellow horn. Free gold!

We were out of the house and in the hills before daylight. Besides the one Pete had discovered, we found several other veins in the same vicinity. All were mineralized and one more contained free gold. And at the foot of a cliff, just below a heavy gossan, there was an old mine tunnel. Fallen rocks had partly obscured its mouth from the rusty hill above, where the gossan zone formed an arc or anticline.

Gingerly we crawled in. Just inside the mouth, partly buried by gravel, stood a decayed, home-made wheelbarrow, its wheel and axle carved in one piece out of a section of a large log. A shovel, also whittled from wood but tipped with heavy tin, leaned against the wall. The tunnel went in thirty feet and stopped abruptly. Although I struck several matches and looked at it I saw no mineralization in its face.

Outside the tunnel was a dump and in an alder thicket nearby the remains of a crude forge and the kiln where the tunneller had burned his charcoal. The whole was very old, certainly from a time before Dardier. Birches thicker than my arm grew on the old dump and the old stumps in the clearing were rotten shells, overgrown with moss, which fell to pieces at a touch.

Who had the old miner been, who with hard toil and primitive means had drilled—obviously with handsteel—and blasted this tunnel thirty feet into the hard rock? He had left without reaching his objective—the downward projection of the rusty zone on the hillside above. The rock at the face of the tunnel was as barren as at its mouth. Why had he quit? And how long ago had he worked there? Twenty, thirty years before?

Our imaginations worked overtime. Although I had lived nearby I had never seen the tunnel before; I had not even heard of its existence. Nor had I heard anything about the man who made it. My thoughts went involuntarily to Piche, the old sourdough, who had died and taken his secret with him. Had he, while he worked here, discovered one of the gold veins nearby, possibly the very veins we had just prospected, and, abandoning his tunnel, hotfooted it for Edmonton instead, on that tip from which he never returned?

We speculated on all these things as we spent the rest of the day examining the neighbourhood. And when we started to stake the gold veins, we decided to include the tunnel, since it lay so close. And in honour of the old-timer we called our group the Piche.

While we were staking, the storm, which then had blown for a week, ended in a new snowfall. Afterwards it turned clear and cold. Winter had arrived. All the other men in camp hurried to depart before the lake froze over. Only Pete and I, who wished to finish our staking, worked on—although we watched closely the edge of new ice creep further and further out on the bay.

Finally the work was finished, and the morning when we were to leave broke clear and cold. A sheet of ice, covered with snow, lay on the bay a long way past the landing. On our way out we had to break it for a thousand feet or more before reaching open water where we could start the engine.

Before leaving Sucker Bay there was one more chore I had to do. Far out in the mouth, between the two points on which the discoveries had been made, lay a little islet, so tiny that nobody had bothered to stake it. But whoever did would have a full claim on the lake bottom around it right in line between the two discoveries. The only difficulty, and probably the reason why nobody had bothered, was that the mining authorities would possibly not record a claim staked there. A claim, to be legal, had to have a certain amount of land on it. But I decided to run that risk; it was worth a try anyway.

Only one tree, an old gnarled birch, grew on the island. So I had hewed my corner posts at the cabin and put them in the boat. Pete laughed at my brainwave when we pushed off.

When we landed at the island I at once raised the posts and started gathering rocks for the supporting mounds. Pete meanwhile walked around and hammered at rocks. When I was almost done he came to me and said with a sheepish grin that perhaps my idea was not so foolish after all, and would I let him stake half of the island?

Now it was my turn to smile as Pete attacked the crooked birch and started chopping corner posts from it. I in turn drifted around. I looked at the formations. From the farthest point I discovered a two-foot quartz-vein shining white among the green seaweed in perhaps a foot of water twenty feet from shore. With a shout I called Pete over and pointed out the vein. He scratched his head. How could we get samples?

There was only one way; and we hesitated before we decided to take it. Then off with pants and socks, and shivering and shaking we waded out into the freezing water and wind. There we knocked and pried and pounded, splashing water over ourselves until we were blue from cold. Our teeth chattered so that we could not talk, and we had to walk ashore again. By then we had succeeded in prying loose some quartz chips, big enough for assaying. The Indian dance we vigorously performed during the next few minutes was not intended to demonstrate our enthusiasm; it was sheer necessity to get the blood to circulate again. And when we had regained part of the use of our limbs we jumped into the boat

and made for the nearest land, where we changed our clothes by a roaring camp-fire.

'I think we should stake four claims with the centre corner on the island,' Pete suggested when he had put the tea kettle on.

'Sure, that's fine by me. I only hope we'll get them recorded.' I laughed. 'Boy, won't those fellows next door kick like mules if we do.'

'To heck with them! Once the claims are recorded, they won't be able to do a thing about it! Let's try anyway.'

And so we did. When we left the islet after one more visit, a cluster of sixteen posts in one big rock-mound in the centre witnessed to the corners of various claims.

Our journey home went without incident. It was clear and calm all the way, but so cold that the sea-smoke rose from the lake like steam from a boiling kettle. It lay on the water in thick shrouds, through which the trees on the shores, powdered by hoar-frost, occasionally gleamed dead-white in the sun, only to disappear again. Patches of thin, elastic skin-ice floated on the sluggish, oily water. We were leaving the narrow eastern parts of the lake at the eleventh hour. Anytime now they would freeze over in a single night.

But we were in on the Sucker Bay gold rush. I was vindicated to myself at least, and had showed up my tormentors who, shore-bound by the storm, had waited so long for good weather that they had been forced to return without reaching their goal.

This knowledge was like balm on the smarting wound to my conceit. But best of all was the thought that perhaps we really had a gold mine at last!

CHAPTER VIII

IN Goldfields we were met by good news and happy faces. Some of those who had returned early from Sucker Bay had already received their assay returns. These had been good all through; in some cases excellent. Several stakers had already sold their claims for handsome prices, while those who had not were rich in imagination and acted accordingly.

The lucky ones bought drinks for the house at the bootleg joints and paid for them with bills peeled casually from big rolls carelessly kept in their trouser pocket and pulled out to demonstrate their new-found wealth to the envious. The stakes were high at the poker-tables, and Mickey and her sisters, who lived discreetly at the edge of the town, were busy around the clock. In the street the fortunate ones strutted along, with their faces folded in sombre wrinkles, as if great cares of which other mortals knew little had been thrust upon their shoulders.

Pete and I also were tentatively accepted into this circle; we too were of the brotherhood of Sucker Bay stakers. With ever-growing tension we waited for our assay results, unable to work.

Then they came. Every one was good. A couple ran better than two ounces of gold. These were from Piche, but even the chips we had loosened from the submerged quartz vein on Nugget showed half an ounce.

We were now every bit as important as the next fellow, and consequently had our share of envy and adulation. Almost at once we had an offer for Piche, but we did not consider it good enough and decided to wait for better ones.

Now we wanted to record our claims. Tense and somewhat apprehensive we went to the mining recorder. Would he accept our island as being big enough to stake claims on? It was entirely

up to his discretion; his word was the deciding one. On pins and needles I watched him go through the thick sheaf of maps and forms that were required for such an occasion, and when, after a few perfunctory questions, he signed the forms, we drew a deep sigh of relief. For once we had been really lucky.

From the recording office we went straight to the outfit that owned the ground on both sides of our Nugget group, and offered them our land—or rather our water. Now that it was recorded we held the trump card, and our claims had a definite nuisance value.

We sold the group the same day and received the down payment. It was not a very big sum, but it paid us well for our work and expenses. Subsequent payments, if they ever materialized, would put substantial sums in our pockets. I felt like Croesus at the thought of it.

With the selling of the Nugget group I suddenly became an authority on Sucker Bay. I felt shame when some diffident individual asked me what I thought of this or that group of claims, and, hiding my ignorance under a cloak of importance, delivered my weighty opinion.

If Sucker Bay looked good it was the opposite with Regina Gold Mines Ltd. After their initial payment, which had gone largely to pay for Shirley's trip down and the supplies he brought with him, they had sent us no more money, although our contract called for an additional payment each succeeding month. When he did not offer them a goldmine on a platter in a month, they considered themselves shamelessly cheated and refused categorically to finance the venture further. I had over two months' pay outstanding in addition to a considerable sum of my own money that I had spent on supplies, while waiting for the payments. Nothing arrived in spite of letters and wires; finally Regina did not even bother to reply.

When it had finally become clear that our financiers declined the role, we stopped work. Shirley was worried and I was angry. But that of course was of no avail.

In November we moved back to Goldfields. Lake Athabasca had been frozen only a week and the ice was very thin in places,

but although it creaked and bent dangerously under our heavy load, the trip passed without mishap and we arrived safely at my cabin.

While Jack was still unpacking I went to the store for supplies, and incidentally, also for the latest news. I was in the Hudson's Bay store when Stan Wylie, who was running the outpost at the Cannery, drove up to the door. Without giving himself time even to tie up his dogs, he rushed into the store and shouted to the manager: 'Ralph, come over to the barracks with me! John Harms has gone crazy and killed his partner over by Lobstick Island!'

The news hit like a bomb. We crowded around Stan and listened avidly to his story.

It was a sorry tale in which all the basest instincts of man—envy, jealousy, hate and perverted sex—played a part, crowned by drunkenness and murder. It had been enacted on the lake shore during a few murky fall-winter days with two small log cabins as the setting and the dark, bloodtinge spruce forest as the backdrop.

Many years before, John Harms, a burly man of about fifty, had come from the South with his brother and the latter's wife, and settled on the lake shore to trap. There was something obscure about their past, and soon John especially got himself known as a quarrelsome and violent man. He could not get along with his neighbours and had a continual grudge. He was forever threatening to get even with someone, now with one person, now with another. He was also the only man on the lake who carried a gun. He always wore one hidden under his overalls.

Some years after his arrival he had a violent quarrel with his brother. What John threatened him with, nobody knows, but the brother left in terror, forgetting even to take his wife along. She then lived with John until her death some years later.

Sometime during the past summer two young men on their way to Goldfields had stopped for the night at John Harms' cabin. Harms had talked one of them, John Anthony, into staying with him for the winter and trapping in partnership with him.

Already at the start of the season the companions had disagreed. According to the neighbours, Anthony had been dissatisfied, because, as he said, Harms hardly left his cabin, but sat there all

day long making and drinking homebrewed beer. Harms maintained that he had no ground left to trap on, that Anthony had taken what his neighbours had not stolen and that it was useless for him to go out. A couple of times Anthony had complained about the matter to Ira Allen and his wife Mickey, who lived some four miles away with their little son.

Such was the situation when Anthony one afternoon, on his way home from the trapline, decided to visit the Allens. When he came within sight of the cabin he saw two figures struggling on the ice beside the water-hole. Running to the spot he recognized Harms and Mickey Allen and rushed to the woman's help. Anthony was small and slight but finally succeeded in pulling his burly partner, who was very drunk, away from Mickey. He told Harms sharply to come to his senses and 'act like a gentleman', something which was probably an impossible task for him at anytime.

Harms was very angry, but had sobered enough to realize that the opportunity was past. Whereupon they all repaired to Allen's cabin, where Harms had left his dog-team. Perversely refusing to go home before they all had had 'a drink together like friends', he went out to his sleigh for some beer.

Meanwhile Mickey told Anthony that Harms had arrived about an hour before, quite drunk, and had tried to force first some beer and then himself on her. To interrupt these advances and to get away, Mickey had taken a pail and gone for water. Harms had followed her, and had tried to rape her just when Anthony arrived and intervened. Harms must have known that her husband had left the day before for a week's trip over his trap-line.

Harms came in, placed some bottles of beer on the table, started drinking and became quarrelsome again. He became steadily drunker and more disagreeable, but when the beer was finally finished Anthony persuaded him to start for home. They left in Harms' dog-sleigh.

About an hour later, when it was getting dusk, Harms again appeared, but alone. This time he was fairly sober and seemed upset, and asked Mickey Allen to come with him to look at Anthony, who was very ill.

Mickey at first refused, but when the man's entreaties became more urgent, and he appeared really worried, she consented. Quickly she dressed her son and took him along in the sleigh. Harms stood behind and drove the team.

When they came to Harms' cabin, he opened the door, pushed the woman and child in first, and stepped past them to light the lamp. As soon as she entered Mickey made out a formless bundle on the floor near the stove. With the first flicker of light she saw that it was Johnny Anthony. He lay motionless on his side in a large pool of blood, obviously dead.

With a cry the woman grabbed her little son, flung open the door and hurried out. She ran down the trail homeward. She was frantic; all she could think of was to get away from this awful sight and the crazed murderer. Even while she ran she could hear him swearing furiously and yelling to her to stop and come back. She was already some hundreds of feet away when she heard two shots in quick succession, saw one bullet kick up the snow at her feet and felt the other whistle past her cheek.

Blessing the darkness, which spoiled Harms' aim, she rushed on. She had reached the little fringe of spruce and willows which lined the shore-line when she heard Harms, still swearing, start his dog-team in pursuit. Quickly she stepped off the trail and crouched motionless, pressing her boy to her, behind some shrubs. As Harms approached she expected to be discovered, but again darkness sheltered her. He passed and disappeared, still cursing and yelling at the top of his voice, into the murk out on the ice.

Sobbing her relief the woman returned to the trail. Then she stopped. What should she do now, where could she go for help? Her boy was already shivering in the freezing cold and she had to get him into shelter quickly. Harms' cabin and her own were the only ones within miles, and her husband was away. In the cabin behind her Anthony lay dead. She shivered at the memory of what she had seen there, and could not return to it. She could only go home. She hurried on, hoping fervently that Harms would not be there. Anyway, without breaking down the door he could not get in, for she had locked the cabin before she left and the key was in her pocket.

But Harms was shrewd. When the woman drew close to her cabin, she saw the dog-team at her door. Then she heard snores. Harms had fallen asleep in the sleigh.

Carefully, so as not to awaken him or disturb the dogs, she drew slowly closer. One of the dogs growled, but subsided and wagged its tail when it recognized her. With pounding heart she finally stole past the sleeping man and on to the cabin without waking him up. Weak with relief she went in, locked the door again, and barricaded it and the window with tables and benches. Then she loaded her husband's shotgun and put all the axes and knives within reach.

Wishing with all her heart that her husband would come home, but knowing that it was a vain hope—he was not due for several days yet—she put the boy to bed, and sat by his side to await events. Exhausted, she dropped off to sleep.

Harms woke at daybreak and started pounding on the door to get in. He told the woman that it was useless to hide. He knew she was there and would come to get her. Then he showered her with the coarsest abuse that he could lay tongue to. She would soon find out what happened to people who tried to cross him. While he was kicking at the door until the cabin shook he told her in detail what he would do to her and how. All this with more oaths.

Mickey was terrified, but did not let it show in her voice when she pluckily assured him that she would ‘blow his head off’ with the shotgun if he tried to break in. After this Harms refrained from trying. Instead he tried a siege.

He built a big fire outside, camped beside it and roasted moose-meat, which he found on the stage, warmed beer-bottles, ate and started drinking again. Occasionally he interrupted his carousing to walk around the cabin and pound and kick the walls and yell insults at his prisoners. Mickey tried to keep terror from her voice as she calmed her weeping boy. Fortunately the man did not try to break in again.

The bear mercifully came to an end and Harms went home. But first he warned Mickey not to try to escape, he would be sure to catch her with his dogs before she got very far.

While Harms was away Mickey had time to get wood and water and food from the warehouse. Then he returned with more beer and the siege continued. This time he had a good supply of bottles which he lined up around the campfire where they would not freeze. He started a drinking bout without parallel, emptying one bottle after another. He devoured chunks of moose meat, which he had roasted; he howled the dirtiest songs he knew and shouted curses at the top of his voice. Between whilsts he staggered around the yard and banged on the walls with a bottle. He really gloried in frightening his helpless prisoners as much as he could.

The peak of this orgy was reached one evening when he staggered to the window and after overwhelming Mickey with vituperation stood there and performed an indecent act.

For three days he besieged the cabin. At last the beer was definitely gone and Harms began to sober up. On the fourth day, in the morning, he came to the door and asked Mickey in a humble voice to let him in.

She refused stoutly: 'I don't want a murderer in the house. Go away. If you try to come in I'll shoot!' Harms then went away.

A little later he came to the door for the last time: 'All right, Mickey. I'm leaving. Tell them they'll find me at Burned Dog Island.' Then he drove off. Mickey collapsed, weeping.

The following day a neighbour from further down the lake happened to come by, and found her hysterical in the cabin. He took her and the boy at once to the Cannery and left her in care of some friends. Shortly afterwards, Stan Wylie started for Goldfields.

Stan finished his story, to which we had listened in breathless silence. Then he remembered. 'I've got to go to the police and report it,' he shouted and hurried away.

I got up too. I had also remembered. Jack! This was something for him. I almost ran to the cabin.

And now I had the opportunity to see an old reporter in action. From my first words Jack was a changed man. News was to him like smoke to an old firehorse. In a moment he had found his camera, some foolscap, his pen and typewriter, and, after a few questions, was off like a foxhound on a fresh scent. Only a few

minutes later he caught Stan as he was returning from the police barracks, manœuvred him into a corner and started firing questions at him. As soon as Stan stopped Jack shot another question at him and scribbled down the reply in shorthand. In five minutes he had pumped Stan dry of all he knew, taken his picture and was on his way to the radio station.

'Well, what do you think of it?' I demanded.

'Boy! It's a pip,' Jack replied, looking like a well-fed cat. 'It's funny, but I've always been lucky in being on the spot when something happens. Nigger's luck!'

He started sending his story at once. Canadian Press, Associated Press, *Chicago Herald* . . . I heard him rattle off the addresses. And when he had dictated the first sheet to the operator, he started tapping down the next with two fingers, the sound of his typewriter blending with the staccato of the telegraph key and the hollow hum of the motor. One after the other the sheets were filled and went out on the air. Except for official business Jack kept the operator busy. This was also the place to hear news of the progress of the manhunt. The police from Fort Chipewyan had already started out and a plane from Fort MacMurray had gone ahead to reconnoitre, and wanted to know if the ice in Goldfields Bay was strong enough to land on. We were still in the freeze-up period and no ski-equipped planes had as yet been in.

All this was of course grist for Jack's mill. Every so often he sent out a new bulletin or asked me to make the rounds of the settlement for additional information.

Soon the replies began to flow in: 'Swell trapper-murder-story! Let her come!' wired *Chicago Herald*. 'Send more!' urged another paper.

Jack let the story go out. All day and far into the night, until the station closed, he kept the poor operator going—hardly giving him a chance to eat—and kept competitors from sending their stories, for there were some would-be journalists around who smelled easy money and wanted to make some.

But Jack was their match. 'If I have to start sending *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, those so-and-so's are not going to get out one word ahead of me. First come, first served!'

The most persistent opponent was the new schoolteacher, who had recently been made a J P., and who in addition was supposed to be the correspondent for some newspaper. Trying to use his official position as a cloak, he insisted on getting an opportunity to send his story, and after a while became quite importunate.

But Jack softened him. First he pointed out that the paper probably had the story already. Then he told the man that it was not fitting for a man in his position as J.P. to dabble in reporting, especially as he probably would preside over the hearing of the case. If that was so, he just could not write about the case, it would show a bias not consistent with his high office. Then Jack broadly hinted that he did not like amateurs scabbing in the profession by which he made his living anyway, and that he could give everybody connected with the case a lot of free publicity—good or bad depending on the circumstances.

I do not think that the little schoolteacher had realized until then the importance of his position in the community. But when Shirley was finished with him he certainly was fully aware of it. When he left the radio station, completely mollified, he was at least two inches taller, several points straighter in the back, and his features carried a dignified expression that never left them thereafter. He really did preside over the preliminary hearing, and I do not think that he ever again dabbled in journalism.

Jack treated other would-be reporters as curs, beneath contempt, who tried to take the bread from his mouth, until they slunk off with their tails between their legs.

Reports of new developments were coming in. The plane had flown over Harms' cabin on Burned Dog Island, and reported seeing smoke issuing from the chimney. It dropped a message to the police patrol, which now was only a few miles away.

When a few hours later the police with their deputies approached the cabin they spread out and advanced slowly and carefully, using what shelter they could and keeping their rifles cocked. The notorious Albert Johnson case, in which several men had been killed, was still fresh in their memory and they were taking no chances. But the end of the chase was an anticlimax. Even before the posse was within shooting distance John Harms

came out, tamely waving a dirty white towel, and gave himself up. No Albert Johnson he; armed men were not his forte.

He was handcuffed at once and hustled into the plane which had landed on a nearby bay. He was taken to Goldfields, where he was escorted by armed constables past the gaping populace to the hotel.

Jack was of course in the front rank of the spectators. Busily he ran ahead of the procession, snapping pictures of it. But he did not get a single good shot of the killer, there was always a policeman in the way. Jack thought that they were mean, but I, being more charitable, thought that they were just vain. At any rate he did not get a picture. And at the hotel Harms was locked in a room with a constable on guard outside. In spite of its progressiveness, Goldfields still lacked a 'calaboose'. But Jack gnashed his teeth and swore revenge.

His chance came the same afternoon, when the victim, Anthony, was brought in. When two policemen, the interpreter and Harms together carried the body on a stretcher to a warehouse where it was to be thawed out and prepared for the autopsy, Jack managed to get a couple of excellent pictures. When he had snapped them, he bowed deeply and said:

'Thank you, gentlemen, for your kind co-operation. This unique picture compensates me for those I missed. Just think what a sensational caption. The victim is carried in triumph by the murderer and the police!'

That worked. The police, who realized that they had made a blunder, suddenly softened. From that moment on Shirley got all the pictures and information he required; they even made Harms pose. During the whole preliminary hearing everything was just milk and honey. True to his promise, Jack further improved the cordial relationship by writing about the J.P. and the police in flattering terms whenever he had the chance.

The autopsy showed that Johnny Anthony had died from a bullet wound from a gun of the same calibre as the one owned by Harms. The bullet had entered through the open mouth and gone through the brain. Death had been instantaneous. Harms confessed to the shooting, but pleaded self-defence. And he made the plea stick.

The body was then wrapped in a blanket and placed high on a stage out of reach of loose dogs until it froze again, and was then shipped away for burial.

The carpenter, who had received the order to make a coffin, had a somewhat macabre sense of humour. One day, as he hurried down the street, he saw Ed, a nice but slightly simple old prospector, standing outside his cabin.

'Say, Ed, can you lend me a cross-cut saw?' asked the carpenter. 'I made the coffin a bit too small. Now I have to shorten the stiff's legs a little.'

'A cross-cut,' Ed repeated slowly and scratched his head with his thumb-nail, considering. 'I haven't got one, but I think I know where I can borrow one. Just wait here a minute, I'll be right back.' The story does not say whether the carpenter waited, but in any case the body remained whole.

Some nights later, when the trial was in progress, Ed came into the hotel lobby. It was crowded in there and the only vacant seat was beside a middle-aged fellow, who sat on the couch alone with his hands in his lap. Ed sat down and started chatting.

'I guess you must be a stranger in these parts. Haven't see you around before,' he inquired pleasantly.

'Oh no, I've been around here for years; I just haven't come to Goldfields before,' the man replied. 'I'm from over west a ways; from around the Cannery.'

'From around the Cannery, eh?' Ed was getting interested. 'I've heard they have some good stuff out that way. Some real good prospects out by Cyprus River, they claim. Suppose you know all about that, though, eh?'

'Oh, sure,' admitted the stranger. 'I got some pretty good ground there myself. Gold and molybdenite. But the way things are I can't do much about them now of course.'

'Yea, that's right,' Ed agreed. 'Too much snow in the bush to do anything now. But I suppose you'll start working them right after break-up.' He proffered his cigarette box.

'Oh, I don't think so. With all this trouble hanging over my head I don't know if I'll ever be able to work on them again,' the stranger replied and reached out with both hands for a smoke.

Ed stiffened. His eyes almost popped out of his head when he looked at the hands. Manacles! This was John Harms, the murderer! Quite involuntarily, as if some unknown force had propelled him, he rose from the couch and disappeared out the door.

Poor old Ed. He was always kind and helpful; perhaps a little too gullible at times, but one of the best one could meet in the North. A few years later he got an end that he certainly did not deserve. One summer day he went ashore on a little island in Great Slave Lake to prospect, but pulled his canoe up on shore so carelessly that it drifted away. For more than one week Ed remained there without food and—which was worse—without a mosquito bar or fly repellent. By a mere chance some other prospectors passed the spot, saw his smoke signals and found him there, exhausted from starvation. He was half-blind and swollen from thousands of mosquito bites. His rescuers did their best for him. They gave him what care they could and set out for the hospital in Yellowknife.

But the hardships had been *too great* for Ed. When the party stopped for lunch on the way he suddenly went wild, jumped up and ran off into the bush as if chased by the devil. When his rescuers finally caught up with him he was raving mad and had to be tied. From Yellowknife he was sent outside in a strait-jacket and died soon afterwards in an asylum. But this is getting ahead of events.

The preliminary hearing of the Harms case in Goldfields lasted only a few days. After that Harms was taken outside where he was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. And with that he also disappears from this story.

Jack Shirley also left shortly after for his ordinary job in Regina. Although we did not meet again for several years we remained fast friends and corresponded regularly. Years afterwards we got together again in more civilized surroundings than those described in these chapters.

I never heard anything more from Regina Gold Mines Ltd., and did not receive my back pay either. But during the next few summers I returned occasionally to the property for some additional prospecting and sampling. Hope dies slowly. I did get

some encouraging assays, but they were too scattered to be of interest to mining men. And so I finally had to drop the claims. Our prospect was a typical 'teaser', too poor to make a mine, too good to let go. Even when I gave up, I did so with a feeling that something would be found there yet.

That feeling was true too. Today the same ground is worth a fortune. Gunnar Gold Mines' fabulous uranium discovery at St. Mary's Channel, which is already considered the richest and biggest in Canada, lies within two claim lengths of the old Regina group. The ground is now held by several mining companies whose shares are worth millions.

CHAPTER IX

WHILE the murder and the trial were still the main topics of discussion in Goldfields, something happened which made the people forget the whole business and quickly direct their thoughts and activities into other channels.

With one of the first planes after freeze-up George Carroll returned from Edmonton. George had prospected in the Gold-fields area since the beginning, and held several groups of claims there. When he had left in the fall he had sworn that he was going to stay with 'the old woman and the kids' all winter and not stir a finger before break-up. But here he was back, and his sudden reappearance was something of a surprise to his friends.

When they went to visit George, who had taken a room at the hotel, they asked him the reason for this change of mind. George replied evasively and started speaking of other things. And when some were insistent he became angry and told them to mind their own business. Meanwhile he made several trips to the airways office to inquire for a plane that he could charter for a short trip. He appeared nervous and anxious to get away very quickly. In a few days he managed to surround himself with an aura of mystery.

George's friends quickly came to the conclusion that there was something special in the wind, and that he had not come to Gold-fields for his health. They began to watch him closely while their curiosity mounted. Soon the whole town followed his every move.

Finally a couple of his old cronies asked him point blank to come clean and tell them what he was up to. Then George relented. In strict confidence he told them to be ready when he returned from his trip, in a week or so, if they wanted to be in on something really big. He could not say much more at that

moment, he confided over a glass of beer, but he was going out for something that would make Goldfields look like peanuts, and that if they did as he told them they would never be sorry. Then George left.

After his departure news travelled fast. The initiated pieced together their information and entrusted it to a few select friends. These in turn informed their partners. In an hour the whole town knew that George had a corner on some information, and, being no fool, would not let anything out before he was sure of his own.

Some, who wanted to beat the gun, cornered George's pilot to find out exactly where he had gone. But he just shook his head and smiled. He was sorry but everyone would have to wait until George himself returned.

Meanwhile the rumours grew wilder and more fantastic. The chosen ones met frequently and prepared for their trip, while the uninitiated talked and speculated. The excitement rose to a high pitch. The plane which was to go to fetch George was booked in advance for several trips to the same area, the exact location to be given later.

When the day of George's return approached all Goldfields held its breath, and the rumours had spread as far as Edmonton. Although Christmas was not far off several men had arrived from there to take part in the expected rush. By now everybody knew that a great, new, history-making find had been made.

Then came the day. The plane left to fetch George. A crowd of men had already gathered on the ice. They followed the craft with their eyes as it disappeared over the skyline to the northwest, looked at their watches and walked around kicking their heels together in the bitter cold, not daring to go inside. The outfits of the parties were piled up on the ice in separate stacks, ready for loading, according to precedence.

There was a cry. The plane arrived. George had barely stepped off before he was surrounded by eager friends, who demanded full confession.

George held his promise. And his story equalled the expectations of even the most optimistic.

He related that just before freeze-up a prospector, Tom Larkin

—who was well known in Goldfields—had made a fabulous gold find near Charlot Lake, about thirty miles north of Goldfields. He had found free gold in several places and knew that his discovery was good, even before he staked nine claims and left for Edmonton. But the assays had topped even his wildest hopes. The best one had run better than fifty ounces of gold to the ton, and all the others, even the poorest, had been over one ounce.

For a while Tom had been almost dazed. It was a week before he dared tell anybody about the find. Then he had to confide in somebody and came to George, his oldest friend, urging him to go out and stake, even though Christmas was near. He also asked George to tell some other friends, to whom he wanted to do a good turn, now that he had made his pile.

Then George pulled out a few samples of quartz from his pocket. There was visible free gold in all of them. These all came from the claims that he had staked while the ground was snow-covered and hard to prospect. But he would do better in the spring.

The men surrounding him had hardly dared breathe for fear of missing a single word. At the sight of the samples there was an almost unanimous sigh. They just stared.

Then there was sudden life again. As soon as George had marked the location of the find on eagerly proffered maps, the men rushed to the waiting plane. Shortly afterwards it winged its way northward, and a few minutes later another plane filled with gold-hunters left in its wake. Another couple of dozen anxious men toted their gear down to the ice and waited impatiently for the return of the planes. The rush to Charlot Lake had begun with a bang, and continued unabated for days.

Plane after plane loaded with prospectors left Goldfields, unloaded their cargoes and returned for more, and people with dog-teams were offered large sums to take stakers and their equipment to Charlot Lake quickly.

Around Charlot Lake there was a mad scramble. Night and day the stakers hurried through the snowy bush in the middle of a cold spell which sent the temperature down to 30 degrees below zero, cut lines and hewed corner posts, wrote location notices to

the flicker of a flashlight, stopped only for a breathing spell and a mug of hot tea and a sandwich at a campfire on a lonely lake-shore and rushed on. It was a race between stakers, a race to acquire ground before someone else took it. Snow-shoe and dog-team trails criss-crossed each other in the bush and on muskegs and lakes, and shadowy shapes could be seen running among the trees. In the confusion it happened that two parties staked the same ground simultaneously or that a man who cut the outside boundaries of his group first found somebody else's claims inside, when he started to cut his group into individual claims. The bush around Charlot Lake echoed with shouts, chopping and the howl of dogs.

The newspapers also got wind of the rush and described the 'Bonanza at Charlot Lake' in large headlines and spread their scant information over several columns. And when George Carroll, who had left quietly and unnoticed during the peak of the excitement, reached Edmonton there were long interviews with him.

Shortly afterwards the first participants in the rush returned exhausted, dirty and hungry after several days' uninterrupted work and hardship in darkness and cold. Quickly they sent their samples out and went to bed, tired but happy, to catch up on their sleep and to await their assay results.

Then the assay results began to flow back. But they were far from splendid; some were downright poor. One-tenth of an ounce of gold to the ton was the best. Most were much lower than that; trace or nil were the commonest. The gold-hunters were puzzled, then ill at ease, and the more assays there were without a single good one the more they began to wonder. Soon a rumour started spreading in the settlement that the whole thing was a bluff, and that there was no gold at Charlot Lake.

When some weeks later the news spread that George Carroll, when the rush was at its peak and the papers were full of it, had sold his stakings for a fat but not fabulous price, they were sure. If the claims were as rich as he had claimed, he would either have held out for more or have retained a good interest in them.

And so it was. When the snow had melted the next spring and some of the most stubborn thoroughly examined both their own

and George's stakings, they found only low gold values or nothing at all. And no claims staked by Tom Larkin could be found in the whole area.

So ended the rush to Charlot Lake.

By a mere chance I was saved the expense and hardship of that rush. The day on which George Carroll arrived in Goldfields I went on a trip and returned only when the rush was already so far under way that the chances of getting good ground out there were practically nil. But I was still undecided when I met Pete Larson. He dissuaded me: 'I don't think there's anything around there. I prospected there all last summer and never got even a colour in the pan. Besides, I think old George is a fox. And what do you want more ground for? We've got Piche and Nugget; let's work them first.'

I followed his advice and refrained. And Pete's opinion of George was surprisingly accurate, as subsequent events proved.

After Christmas we travelled to Sucker Bay to work on our claims. The ground was now covered with deep snow, but we had blazed trees near the richest quartz-veins and rusty zones and would have no trouble finding them again. Now we were going to blast pits and trenches across these to get some samples of fresh rock for assay and an idea of the paying widths of the showings.

The coldest weather of the whole winter came just then, and after a few nights, when we had frozen even in our sleeping bags in the cabin, we decided that our little tin stove did not give enough heat. If we were to keep on working, we would have to have something better, so I set out for Stony Rapids for a big cast-iron stove I had stored there.

It was a bitterly cold, blindingly bright morning. The sleigh screeched as it dragged on the powdery hard drifts; my breath froze to a mist the moment it hit the air, and hissed past my ear like an angry weasel. In half an hour my parka-hood was covered with white hoar-frost.

There was a mist of frozen vapours around the dogs and they pulled sluggishly in spite of shouts and curses. They just would not move beyond a slow trot. It was late afternoon when

I stopped the team outside the police barracks in Stony Rapids. Bob, the corporal in charge and old friend, stepped out.

'Holy Christ, Erik! You sure picked a day for travelling! What are you running around in weather like this for?'

'Came for a stove. It's goddamn cold, isn't it?' I replied cheerfully, rubbing my nose and slapping my arms.

Bob said nothing. He just looked at me. Then he took me by the arm and led me over to the flag-pole, to which the official weather-bureau thermometer was attached, and pointed. I bent down and looked, but could not see anything beyond the gradation down to -75 degrees F.

'I can't see anything. It's broken.'

'No it isn't. But the alcohol is all down out of sight. And it's the first time it's been that way since I came here three years ago.'

I looked again. He was right, the alcohol *was* down in the ball below the graduated part of the tube. It was more than 75 below. Suddenly I froze. Almost in a panic I ran back and forth, tethering my dogs and carrying my things inside. Then I followed Bob, who was laughing heartily at my sudden urgency, into the cosy warmth of the barracks. I hardly dared poke my nose outside for the rest of the day.

The temperature did not rise the next day either. Only on the third day, when Bob's thermometer showed a mere 72 degrees below, did I start back for Sucker Bay. I was a bit worried about Pete but consoled myself with the thought that it had been too cold to work outside anyway. I found Pete half frozen and cursing in the cabin, and feeding dry wood to the tin stove.

'Holy Smokes, it took you long enough to get that god-damned stove! The water pail froze and busted night before last and I had to get out of bed to start a fire to keep warm!'

I wisely kept quiet until we had installed the heavy cast-iron heater and its glowing redness spread a welcome warmth into the farthest corners. Then I told him.

Pete was quiet at first. Then he said: 'No wonder. I've never been cold in that sleeping-bag before, even outside. I thought I was getting soft.'

That spell, the coldest all that winter, lasted for another week. Then it became a little warmer—warm enough to work. But even then the frost bit our noses and cheeks, and the fingers that held drill-steels and hammer felt like pieces of wood in a few minutes. We shovelled and drilled, and drank boiling-hot tea to ward off the cold, which went right through several pairs of socks and moccasins and mitts. In handling axes and drill-bits we had to be careful that they did not fly to pieces.

In spite of polar cold and snow we got our work done. A month later we had finished our trenches and had several bags of samples for assay.

Other prospectors were also active in the area. A dozen men worked on the discovery group. We talked to them and were told that the results had been poorer than expected. The veins were spotty, with rich and lean alternating, but the owners were still optimistic and believed in the future of their property.

When Pete and I compared this with our own results, we decided to sell our Piche group at once if we received a reasonable offer. I remained in Sucker Bay—and Pete left with my power of attorney in his pocket. It would be better to sell than to try to develop the claims ourselves.

A few miles away on the lake-shore lived Oscar, a trapper and an old friend since the days I had myself trapped in Sucker Bay. He was a good hunter and a hard worker. Although this had been a poor winter for most, Oscar had already made a good catch of mink and fox.

Oscar was an old hand in the North, and the most helpful and open-handed neighbour one could have. Without hesitation he would give the shirt off his back to anybody in need. He was generous to a fault.

Oscar's biggest fault was his love of argument. He could talk a whole day without stopping if he found a listener with enough endurance. And no matter what the subject, Oscar always voiced an opinion. It always differed from the opinion of anyone else. He loved an argument for its own sake.

To get underway he used to ask me what I thought of something or other, and, when I had voiced my opinion, take a

different stand. Incensed over such a senseless idea, I would contradict him, and the argument began. It got hotter by the minute until we almost flew at each other's throats. Finally I would give in and let him go on. It was no use talking to such a complete idiot. After I had been quiet for half an hour and Oscar had exhausted his store of opinions, he would be sure that he had bested me. Then at last he would stop and strut around, proud and pleased with himself.

After a couple of these sessions I tumbled to the truth. What Oscar had said did not really represent his opinions—to him it was just mental exercise. Not liking these 'discussions', I changed my tactics. The next time he asked me what I thought of such and such, I would innocently reply that I did not know; what did he think? When Oscar had stated what he thought, he would look at me with belligerent expectancy. But he got no satisfaction. I would say, lamely, that he probably was right. Disappointed, he would be silent for a while. Then we would talk of other things, but Oscar would be grumpy the rest of the day.

This strategy worked only a few times. Oscar tried again and again, and his manner told me that he was wise to my tactics. His statements became impossible, deliberately made in order to draw me out.

Finally, he asked me one day if I thought that the astronomers were right when they said that the moon was smaller than the earth and that it circled the earth. He, Oscar, thought it was the other way around. The moon was bigger. 'Well, I don't know, Oscar,' I said. 'I guess maybe you're right. It looks so much bigger than the stars, and some of them are supposed to be bigger than the sun.'

Oscar glared at me. 'Goddamn it! You know damn well I'm wrong! You got no call—you got no right to say I'm right! Why don't you stand up and say so like a man? You just sit there like an old squaw!' he sputtered, and went out, slamming the door behind him.

When he returned he was still mad. 'Wipe that smile off your face,' he said. But then he grinned. 'O.K., Erik, no more arguments. You win.'

We ended on that note and remained good friends afterwards. I often visited him, his kind heart and hospitality more than made up for his little eccentricities.

After Pete had left I went over to Oscar's place quite frequently. There I also met three other men, who the previous fall had been on their way to Sucker Bay but had been frozen in, near Oscar's cabin, before they got there. They had built a cabin on the shore less than a mile away.

One day the talk turned to various properties in the vicinity. There was one group especially which intrigued us. For some reason it was not on the map showing the claims in the area, which was published and revised monthly by the government. After discussing this circumstance repeatedly, we came to the conclusion that here was a clear case of blanketing. Someone had pulled a fast one. But whoever had done it had failed to stake it legally later. Consequently the ground was still open.

We decided to examine the corner-posts closer, and, if we found enough evidence for our suspicions, re-stake the whole group. The next morning we went out, and by noon we had visited most corners. All the claims had been staked in September and the names and licence numbers were either illegible or strange. Even if they had been legally staked, the time for recording had lapsed long ago. That was proof enough. We would start staking at once.

Because there were many other people in the neighbourhood we had to proceed with caution. A crew worked on the next group. To attract no attention we were to move around quietly and avoid showing ourselves on the ice. We even hewed our corner posts in camp before starting out, and transported them to their sites with our teams.

Yet our difficulties were not overcome by this device. Quite the contrary. Five conflicting wills had to be unified first. For among Oscar's new neighbours was a certain Bill Young, his absolute equal in dispute. Immediately after our first decisions, the whole company almost went on the rocks because, no matter what was discussed, the discussion deteriorated into a quarrel between Oscar and Bill, who just could not have the same opinions about anything. We got nowhere, our meetings ended in torrents of abuse.

When the rest of us had agreed on something and went to work, we could be sure that Oscar and Bill would shortly drop whatever they were doing and start an argument.

Regardless of where they were, they would suddenly start the battle, forgetting everything else. If one did something the other considered wrong, it was enough. The rest of us were soon so tired of the situation that we were ready to dissolve the whole company.

I remember especially one clear and sunny day in February when Harry and I were putting some posts in a mound on a hill, while Oscar and Bill were pacing the distance to an island. Suddenly Harry looked up and pointed: 'Look at them. They're at it again!' He continued in desperation: 'You'll see, they'll spoil it for all of us yet!'

I watched them. Out there on the sunbaked bay the two oldsters faced each other, engrossed in a heated argument and waving their arms. Their voices became louder and more strident and abusive. They could be heard clearly, even at that distance. And it looked as if it would break into a fist fight at any moment.

We had to laugh. They looked just too funny out there, circling each other, and waving their arms like a pair of game-cocks. Then we hurried over and parted them, and remonstrated with them for their foolish behaviour. This triggered another stream of argument as to who was to blame.

We then took a drastic step. One of the oldsters was left at home to cook and bake while the other went with us. Then our work proceeded normally.

In spite of these troubles and tribulations we finally got all our claims staked. As the most experienced in such matters, I set out for Goldfields to record, supplied with all the necessary maps, sketches, forms, affidavits and powers of attorney required for such an occasion. Because we suspected that the group had been blanketed before, we had called our claims the Protest group.

Oscar, who wanted to do his old friend Gus a favour, was giving him one of his claims providing Gus paid the recording fee for it. He asked me to deliver this message to Gus.

In Goldfields I found Gus in his cabin in the process of singing

and drowning his sorrows in the company of several pals of the same mind. A substantial shipment of fire-water had just arrived by plane and they were very happy. But while Gus was in that shape he obviously could not be entrusted with our secret. I decided to wait until he was reasonably sober before giving him Oscar's message. Meanwhile I was counting the days I had left for recording the claims.

There were only a few days left when I found Gus unusually sober and clear and told him about his claim and asked him for the recording fee. He became so moved by Oscar's token of friendship that he almost wept and went out to get the money. Then he sat down to celebrate the occasion, and when I, some hours later, came to his cabin I found him with his arm lovingly wrapped around the neck of a boon companion, telling him about all the good friends he still had left in spite of all, real friends who had not forgotten him. I got the money from him and left.

The next day I went to the government office. The recorder looked through the papers and then at his map. He said: 'I am sorry, but this ground has already been recorded.'

'But your map doesn't show it.'

'No, it was done quite recently.'

'When?' I asked. 'By whom?'

'This morning, by Jim Clark. He was given a six-months extension to rectify certain errors in his staking last fall.'

I walked out. It was a wonderfully soft and bright afternoon. The sun shone and little rivulets of snow water trickled down the slopes toward the ice on the bay. The air was balmy as in May and the spruces were several shades greener. The first signs of approaching spring were there. But although I took a deep breath of fresh air, I hardly noticed these things. Jim Clark was one of the men who had been celebrating with Gus in the last few days. I walked off to Gus's cabin.

There the party was still in progress. Jim Clark was also there. He grinned broadly when he saw me and called: 'Hey, Gus, here comes one of your dear friends.' Then he said to me: 'Sit down, Erik. Forget your troubles and have a drink! All's fair in love and mining.'

I swallowed my vexation and followed the suggestion. After a while Clark told me that in his happiness over his good friends, Gus had divulged just how good they were. Clark had not intended to record the claims, for he had not considered them worth the money. The news from Sucker Bay had been discouraging. But when Gus told him about our plans, Jim had thought that we must have found something valuable on them, so he recorded them.

'But don't worry about it, Erik. And don't be mad at Gus. He wouldn't hurt a fly!'

That was true. Gus was all kindness. Just now he was sitting with tears in his eyes and droning sorrowfully 'The Immigrants' Lament'.

The only concrete result of all our work on the Protest group was that Oscar and Bill Young became partners and stuck together for many years. They had found each other. They loved their endless arguments so much that they could no longer get along without them. Whenever they were seen they were showering each other with abuse and were apparently ready to fly at each other's throats. They were partners for many years, until the long arm of the law caught up with Bill and hanged him for a murder that he had committed in the Yukon many years before.

A few days after my return from Sucker Bay Pete appeared. He pulled me aside: 'Athona bought Piche. We got five hundred down; there'll be one thousand more after six months and six thousand after one year.'

That was news! Life smiled again. I walked on air down to Gus's cabin and helped him sing.

CHAPTER X

WITH the coming of spring Goldfields again awoke from its hibernation and rubbed the sleep from its eyes. The boats began to arrive, loaded with an assortment of people and supplies.

In mining the camp was wearing out its baby shoes. Many of the prospects, where there had been feverish activity the summer before, were now quiet and dead, after a thorough exploration they had not stood up to expectations and had been abandoned. Only the fortunate, those on which orebodies of promise had been found, were still active.

Foremost among these was the C.M.&S. property. They were obviously planning mining on a grand scale. At the top of the hill towered the head-frame and nearby the steel skeleton of a mill was taking shape. It was to handle some fifteen hundred tons of ore a day. Underground, too, the work was pushed on at top speed. A mile or more of tunnels, drifts, raises, stopes and shafts had been bored and blasted and an orebody big enough to keep the mill going for years had been blocked out.

On the hillside below the head-frame and facing the lake, buildings were going up, a hospital, a cooking and dining hall, bunk-houses and staff houses for the unmarried, and one-family bungalows for the married employees. Lower down all sorts of sheds, warehouses, steam plants, hangars and repair shops were taking shape.

Power was of course needed for the mill and at Charlot River, some thirty miles west of Goldfields, the work was starting on a hydro-electric plant. By diverting water from its natural outlet, and leading it through new man-made channels, enough electricity would be produced there to supply the mill and the town with all they needed.

Along the right of way for the power-line gangs of labourers were clearing away the bush, blasting rock and building roads. Diesel tractors were dragging sleds with steel beams for the towers, boxes with huge porcelain insulators and eight-foot rolls of copper cable to carry the current. Drovers of blacksmiths, tower monkeys and mechanics assembled the towers and hoisted insulators and cables into place. To more inaccessible places the material was taken by plane.

The company was even building its own diesel-driven tug-boats of steel. These had been transported to Waterways by rail and assembled, and were now plying the lake and the river. They pushed barges loaded to the limit to the newly built dock in the bay. There repair-shops, aprons for the planes and a radio station were going up.

This huge project required two years or more before the mill came into operation and the first gold brick was poured. It would cost millions of dollars to complete.

Athona was going ahead on a smaller scale, but their establishment was also taking on a permanent character. Another promising property was Nicholson Mines. Bossed by a retired R.C.M.P. inspector, they worked on a complex but rich orebody, which contained high values in gold and uranium and lesser amounts of silver, nickel, copper and cobalt.

The awareness that its future was more or less secure set its stamp on the town itself. The air of temporary tent-and barrack-town was disappearing. Streets and blocks were being surveyed according to an approved plan and sidewalks of planking were strung out along them. Buildings that had been erected haphazardly wherever the owners had fancied had either to be moved or torn down, many new substantial buildings were taking their place. Business-men were enlarging their stores or building entirely new ones. We were getting a new bank, churches, schools and a picture house. The outlines of an organized community were emerging out of the confusion.

But what gladdened the hearts of the majority of the town's men was the news that the provincial government was opening a liquor store, and that the first shipment was already on the way in.

Until then those who liked fire-water had been forced to send an order for it and wait a week for it to arrive, or else visit one of the flourishing bootleg establishments. In the first instance, before the bottle arrived the inclination was sometimes spent; in the second, too much money was involved.

It was no wonder that all of us watched and approved the speed with which the new liquor store arose. Then came heady news. The manager, a war veteran, announced that a whole barge-load of beer was on its way in, and that volunteers were needed to unload it. The quicker the barge was unloaded, the sooner the store would be selling it.

An appeal to the men of Goldfields met with the most gratifying response. On the morning when the barge arrived almost the whole male population met at the dock in a fine display of public spirit. Everyone was eager to get the barge unloaded and soon an endless cavalcade of men, each carrying a case of twenty-four pints of Calgary Ale or Bohemian Lager, was coming in through the door to the storehouse where I was industriously stacking the cases in tottering piles. Because of my height I had been given this most responsible office. Before twelve o'clock, the legal hour of opening, the whole barge-load had been transferred to the warehouse, the floor of which was sagging under the weight. Another line of men was forming outside the front door. Everybody was thirsty from the heat and the hard work.

That evening one-quarter of the shipment had been sold, and Goldfields reverberated with song, laughter and just plain whoopee. That night there was also a dance in the new pool-hall. A three-man orchestra was making music, the pianist pounding out the latest hits on Goldfield's only piano, which had been borrowed especially for the occasion from the wife of a store-keeper. The white ladies of the town in 'imported' long dresses, and their men in store suits, contrasted sharply with the rest of the public. Halfbreed girls in garish dresses waltzed nimbly with partners in checkered shirts and work boots or beaded moccasins. Everybody, except the bootleggers, celebrated that night in Goldfields. The gaiety lasted until the early hours of the morning.

As the signs of permanence increased in Goldfields, many of the traits that had marked it as a pioneer Northland community started disappearing. We were becoming a tin-can-store-clothes community. Even the styles were changing. An increasing number of men were appearing in white shirts, hats, ready-made suits and oxfords, and the white women, who now predominated, discarded their slacks and parkas of bright-coloured blanket cloth for dresses and coats such as were worn by their sisters in a thousand prairie towns.

In the social life too there was a perceptible difference. With the arrival of the doctors, druggists, some businessmen and mine officials and their socially conscious wives, it lost the easy one-is-as-good-as-another stamp that it had had hitherto. Society had been thrust on us.

This was evidenced by little tea parties, sewing circles, literary societies and other clique formations of social caste. But just because of this there occurred a droll incident which gave the community's self-appointed social arbiter, Mrs. Burns, a slap from which she never recovered, and others, less conscious of their position, a belly laugh.

With the last plane before break-up arrived a pretty young lady, who, escorted by the gallant pilot, came to the hotel and took a room. In the register she gave her profession as writer. Rumours of the arrival of a lady writer spread quickly and in due course reached Mrs. Burns. She immediately went to call on the new arrival. She welcomed the young authoress to Goldfields, invited her to a ladies' tea-party that same afternoon, and asked her to speak at the meeting of the literary circle the following week. The young lady thanked Mrs. Burns for her kindness and accepted graciously both invitations. Whereupon Mis. Burns departed, happy in the knowledge of a mission well accomplished.

Imagine her vexation when some time later a report reached her that the lady writer, who meanwhile had rented a cabin discreetly on the outskirts of town, where she could live cheaply and work undisturbed, practised a profession of a much longer lineage than journalism. These reports were confirmed when one of the pillars of the community, who was also the husband of one of the

members of the literary circle, was seen one morning leaving the cabin in high spirits after having diverted himself there all night.

The ladies' clubs immediately launched a bitter campaign to evict the seductress. Mrs. Burns first called on the police, who explained that he could do nothing, since there were two rooms in the woman's cabin, unless some witnesses were willing to testify to the charge. However, he declared himself willing to take action if somebody—for instance, Mrs. Burns—would undertake to procure such witnesses. I do not think that after this incident the police was invited to the meetings of the literary or any other circle.

The ladies now tried a new approach. They circulated a petition to clean up the town and exile all bawdy ladies, bootleggers and gamblers. The petition was quickly signed by all the women, and of course their husbands and all the merchants and other people whom the ladies could brow-beat. But it lost much of its edge when some prankster managed to get the signatures also of the lady writer herself and the town's best-known bootlegger. But the coup de grâce was given by a new petition 'Young men's mind-your-own-business petition', which was started at one of the outlying prospect camps. In this the town's ladies, in veiled phrases, were told to jump in the lake. In a short time it received many times more signatures than its rival. That ended the campaign. But Mrs. Burns' position as the social arbiter of Goldfields had received a resounding blow.

All this of course made Muskeg Myrtle, as the controversial young lady was fondly called, very popular among the boys.

Now that the liquor store and other attractions beckoned in Goldfields, trappers from around the lake began coming there to sell their furs and buy their supplies at prices lower than in the trading posts. Many of my old friends from Stony Rapids and Fond du Lac visited the town that summer and several lodged in my cabin during their stay. As a rule they had made good catches of fur in the preceding season and were anxious to have as good a time as possible during their short summer holiday. This meant liquor and women and more liquor.

My little cabin came to be a sort of headquarters for much of this carousing, and the parties that took place made even the hard-boiled miners and drillers, who were used to that sort of thing, open their eyes. The bacchanalia continued unabated for weeks, because when somebody left there was always someone else to take his place. I was soon dead-tired of it all, but northern hospitality forbade me to tell my old friends to get out. But I wished I could get out myself.

Then came a longed-for diversion.

Among my friends who visited Goldfields were Albert and Joe. Albert had become old and grey in the North. He had originally come to Lake Athabasca in 1915 with Dardier, and had trapped and prospected there ever since. He was well liked and respected by everybody because a more honest, good-hearted and upstanding man was hard to find. Stocky, with a weather-beaten face adorned by a sharp nose, white eyebrows and a pair of bright blue eyes framed in a grey thatch, he was the prototype for a real northerner.

His greatest weakness was an exaggerated regard for book learning and all who possessed it. However much a trifler a man might be, he found favour in Albert's eyes if he only had some education. Albert himself had no more education than he had acquired by himself in spare moments. But he loved long and complicated words, and studded his conversation with them. Wrongly pronounced and spoken with a horrible Swedish accent, his speech at times became unintelligible. When he started to spout geological and mineralogical terms it became especially grotesque. Even difficult terms were not complicated enough for Albert—he adorned them with an extra syllable or two of his own. The sum total was fantastic. If the listener stared in amazement, Albert only strained his vocabulary yet farther. He loved to impress people, and he did it too, although not in the way he intended.

Joe was an altogether different type. Although no Einstein, he was a hard worker and had a boundless respect for his partner's greater intelligence. To him Albert's will was law, and as the latter was honest as the day, the partnership worked out very well.

They had been in town a few days when Joe asked me to come

to their tent. Albert had some business to discuss. I went there the same afternoon. After a few preliminaries Albert brought out a bag of mineral samples and said: 'Erik, you know the companies here and to whom to go with a find. I think Joe and I have something good and if you can take us to the right outfit and help us make a deal, we'll cut you in on it. Anybody except Aurum—they're a bunch of crooks and highway robbers, the whole crowd of 'em.'

His samples looked very good, a mixture of about 50 per cent quartz and sulphides, mostly pyrite and pyrrhotite but mixed with some chalcopyrite and arseno-pyrite and a black, hard metallic mineral that I could not identify. Most of them were taken right from the surface; they were covered with rust and pitted with holes that had contained minerals that had weathered out. I looked at them admiringly and started asking for details about the find.

Their descriptions were vague. They could tell me very little except that they had found the spot during the spring beaver-hunt and had dug out these samples in a spot where the ground was very rusty for a long way around. They knew nothing about the width and length of showing, or about surrounding rock types. Nor had they staked any claims.

I explained that we would need much more information about the size and nature of the find before we could start to talk to a mining company. I suggested that we go back first and examine the find closer, blast out some fresh samples and stake a few claims for protection. After a short conference we agreed to start for the showing at once. It was located not too far from the lake-shore up near an old portage route, and could be reached in a few days. We made feverish preparations and started out the same evening. I was happy to get away from Goldfields and all the party life, which was still in full swing. It was a chance to bow out gracefully, although it meant leaving my trapper friends in possession of my cabin.

All night we journeyed over the calm, mirror-bright lake. The russet sky and the lilac hills were reflected in the water in deeper hues. Out of low-lying valleys white mist welled out on the bays and high-flying cumulus clouds were gold and black ships on the

skyline to the northwest. The high hills behind the Cannery were an uneven saw-blade, sharp and clear. Barely perceptible swells lifted the boat in an even, somnolent measure. Albert steered, his eyes fixing some landmark far away.

It was morning when we arrived in the Cannery, hungry and tired and stiff from the dawn chill. The Cannery was a little trading station, beautifully situated on the shores of a sheltered bay on the north shore of the lake. The bay is deep and its crystal-clear water abounds in fish. It is surrounded by pine-covered hills which grow high and dark to the north. Some years earlier, someone, attempting to export the famous Athabaska trout, had built a fish-cannery there. The venture had been a dismal failure, but locally the name still stuck. Now only about a dozen white families and the same number of Indians lived here, but in the summer many Indians gathered there for the 'treaty'. They pitched their tents on the sandy shore near the portage to Tazin Lake.

One reason for stopping there on our way was to pick up Magnus. He had been prospecting with Albert and Joe before, and they wanted to cut him in on this new 'mine'. But Magnus was not at all keen to leave. He had just struck up a beautiful friendship with a young Indian girl, which was developing in a very favourable manner. Besides he had a barrel of beer brewing and it was nearly ready. Only a few days more and it would be ripe. Anybody who wanted to start running all over the bush now when the weather was at its hottest and the flies at their worst needed to have his head examined.

But Albert and Joe would not listen. If Magnus wanted his share he would have to come along. Grumbling, Magnus gave in, left his barrel and his girl-friend in someone else's care and started packing his bag. The next morning we continued westward.

Fifteen miles on a little stream enters the lake. Here we started inland along a route that followed it. The boat was pulled up on shore and left. From then on we would use a couple of little canoes that we had towed behind.

Magnus' fears and predictions proved well founded. It was now the height of summer and the sun beat down fiercely; mosquitoes

and black flies flew at us in gleeful frenzy, hissing at each other as they fought for standing room on the exposed parts of our bodies. They surrounded us in clouds while we paddled; they probed, bit and stencilled our skins when we packed over the portages. The sweat poured off us in streams and in my frenzy to swat the flies I almost hit myself on the head with my axe. It was pure misery. Magnus, who suffered as much as anybody, was still unable to keep from gloating:

'Serves you right for being a bunch of silly asses and tearing off into the bush like dry shirts in the wind, when you could've stayed at home with nothing to do but drink and make love! I'm a worse fool, though. I knew what I was letting myself in for. Oh, oh, I never know when I have it good.' He groaned and rolled over in the grass.

We did not reply. Gasping from heat and exertion, we lay in the shade of a poplar, wiping off the rivulets of perspiration that ran down our necks. The last portage had been like the ante-room to hell.

'You know,' said Albert, as he lazily swatted half a dozen mosquitoes, which were settled on his nose and gorging themselves, 'a fellow once told me something interesting about mosquitoes. He said that blood is to them like rum to a man, they get drunk on it. You see they usually live on nectar and plant juices, but blood gives them extra strength. This fellow said that a mosquito that has drunk blood will lay a hundred times more eggs than one that hasn't. It improves their reproductive capacity.'

'That might be so, all right,' I agreed. 'It's the female that stings.'

Magnus sat up. 'Well, I'll be jiggered! You fellows got me here just to give a bunch of flying, female drunkards a good jag! For chrissake!'

We all laughed and got up and shouldered our packs. From thence on the going was easier. Magnus swatted mosquitoes and swore that he was not going to provide anybody with a drink when he could not have one himself and that he was doing more good than ten temperance societies.

Our route lay next across some large lakes where the wind kept the pests away, cooled our bodies and dried the perspiration until our shirts felt hard and stiff. Life was getting livable again.

One lake which we crossed was perhaps the most beautiful that I have seen so far north. The rocks underlying the area were rich in lime and the soil supported vegetation as luxurious as anything I had seen hundreds of miles farther south. Great spreading aspens, tall black poplars and birches, two feet thick or more at the butt, crowded each other for room, while the branches of willows and alders and choke-cherries reached far out over the water. The ground was carpeted with grass, ferns and plants of the greenest green. Except for the high hills, conifers were absent. One could easily picture oneself in a warmer climate. Joe said that the surroundings were good pasture-land for game. 'I hope I see a moose,' he added, and licked his lips.

Late that night we reached the west shore of the lake and camped. The showing was on the shore of a creek some two miles on, Albert said. By the camp-fire he drew a crude map.

Early next morning we were up. After an hour's walk we had reached our goal. We stopped at the bank of a little creek that meandered among grassy meadows. The slope of the opposite bank was covered with rust over a wide area, and on a nearby knoll a quartz vein outcropped. In a minute we had waded across the creek and attacked it with hammers, picks and shovels. As we dug, pried and pounded a splendid sight unfolded. Cubes of pyrite in the rusty sand glittered and flashed like gold when the sun's rays struck them; the quartz was seamed with gleaming minerals. Occasionally we uncovered chunks of pure sulphides as big as cabbage heads. We spread out over an ever-widening area. Soon we were surrounded by heaps of rocks and mineral samples. Turning them over we could not decide which were the best, they all looked good. Then we spread out to look for the extension of the vein. On the other shore of the creek, a hundred yards away, we found it. Here it was still wider, nearly six feet, and every bit as rich. The chalcopyrite glittered in the fresh breaks and on the oxidized surfaces the pyrrhotite gleamed in varicoloured hues like the feathers of a peacock. This really looked good.

Afterward we sat late into the night and planned by the campfire. While the sparks rose with the smoke and the fire lighted weather-beaten and unshaven faces, the discussion grew hot. When I suggested that we first look for additional veins and then blast open the most promising ones for fresh samples for reliable assays, I was met by a storm of protests. Said Magnus: 'Are you plumb nuts? Do you want to bring everybody in the country over here?'

It was a typical remark. As soon as a prospector finds something in the heart of the wilderness miles from the nearest living soul, he is at once sure that the woods are full of spying people ready to jump and steal his find. The boys obviously thought that the blasts would be heard clear across the land and bring every claim-jumper to the place at the double. It was funny, but that is the way prospectors are.

I tried to point out the absurdity of their reasoning. Even if somebody did hear the shots—which was very unlikely—how would he know what they meant and where they came from? And even then, how could he find the spot? I was by then a bit more hardened than I had been. But it did not help. Magnus, who was now badly bitten by the gold bug, was especially hard to convince. After a long talk we finally compromised.

We would first spend a couple of days on prospecting the vicinity, then we would drill holes in the most likely-looking vein and blast them all at the same time, so that there would be only one explosion. Magnus still protested but was overruled, and had to agree.

We began exploring the countryside the next morning. But we found little more. After an hour's unsuccessful search we would end up by the old find, where we would dig deeper and gloat over the new pieces of minerals that we uncovered. As if by mutual consent we started drilling. Then we loaded and blasted the whole thing at once. The shots had hardly gone, and the last pieces of flying rock had barely stopped falling, when we rushed back.

A treasure chest, suddenly thrown open, has never disclosed a sight gaudier than our pits! The quartz was striped and spotted with golden and silvery material. The ground was littered with

gleaming rocks. We dug and hammered; one sample was more beautiful than the one before and soon we had gathered around us heaps of specimens big enough to sink a barge. With heavy hearts we let our common sense guide us and resolutely discarded all except those that were needed for assays and some especially pretty ones for ourselves. Even then each one of us smuggled some additional specimens into his packsack, when he thought no one else was looking. After staking one claim on the find, for protection, we left, suddenly anxious to get back to Goldfields, from where we could send our rocks out for assay.

It was evening by the time we paddled across the lake. Old Albert in his little twelve-foot canoe was in the lead. He paddled steadily and fearlessly across the three-mile open stretch, although he had barely two inches of freeboard in his heavily laden craft. We had just rounded a point and were only a few hundred feet from the far shore when his experienced hunter's eyes discovered a moose immersed to its neck in the water, where it had escaped the great swarms of torturing flies. Smoothly Albert laid down his paddle; up came the rifle and the shot went as soon as the stock hit his shoulder. The moose reared up, made some great lunges toward land but collapsed before it got there.

It was a big fat cow with wonderfully tender meat. We camped right there for the night, and skinned and dressed the animal. Then we sat far into the morning and fried liver, cooked tongue and roasted the muzzle slowly on the embers. We had gold fever to be sure, but not enough to keep us from enjoying a meal of fresh fat moose meat. The instinct of the hunter had come to the fore.

The remainder of the canoe trip was very risky, because we had now at least an additional three hundred pounds of moose meat to transport in our already overloaded small craft. We scarcely dared to shift our paddles, and sat like statues and scanned the water anxiously for any ripples that might indicate a sudden squall. And the portage route was now worse than on the way in. Then we had carried everything over in one trip; now we each had an additional trip. The mosquitoes and black flies must still remember that summer with longing. Only now Magnus did not

complain or talk about beer and women. He worked like a horse to get to Goldfields as fast as possible.

When we came to the Cannery we only stopped long enough to give away most of the moose meat before continuing. Magnus made no attempt to remain. Joe said. 'What about your beer and the girl-friend?'

'To heck with them, I can get both in Goldfields!'

He climbed in and pushed off. We started across the lake.

Within an hour after our arrival in Goldfields our samples were on the way out and the tedious period of waiting for results started again. It was hard on the nerves and I had now nothing against the parties that were still in progress. But every evening the four of us discussed our showing and wondered what the unidentified black mineral could be. We perused all the handbooks and mineral tables we had, but could not identify it.

Then Pete came to town. He had, as I knew, a mineral-testing set with all the necessary chemicals. Unable to stand the suspense any longer we showed him our samples, and asked him to run a test on the black mineral. We promised him the first chance to stake after we had what we wanted. Pete was very impressed. He took a sample, and set off for home, promising to test it as soon as he got there.

The next day he was back. He looked carefully around in the cabin and outside before he closed the door and said in a heavy whisper: 'Boys, you've got tin, cassiterite!'

We suddenly came to life. Tin! That was something! Something that every prospector in Canada dreams of finding. Not a single commercial deposit had been found in the whole country so far, and the government had promised a big cash bonus to its discoverer. Now we had one! Cassiterite contains about 70 per cent tin, we saw in the handbook.

This called for a celebration, we decided, happy and elated. A couple of cases of beer were bought and as the contents diminished the discussion became livelier and hopes rose higher. When the beer was consumed the session ended and each went his way to continue the feast; it was not difficult to find the right company for that sort of thing in Goldfields.

Albert and Joe and I came home reasonably early, but Magnus did not appear until the early hours of the morning, and Pete, who was temperate in his habits, had gone straight to bed in his tent.

The next morning, when Albert and Joe and I went out for breakfast (Magnus was still dead to the world), we soon noticed that something was in the wind. Here and there in the street small groups of men were eagerly discussing something, and as we passed they hailed us with friendly greetings or a jest. And practically everyone we met looked curiously at us as they voiced their greetings, and talked in low voices when we had passed.

'Queer, but we've become mighty popular all of a sudden,' I said.

Albert looked up. 'Yes, I was thinking the same thing. It ain't natural. There's a nigger in the wood-pile someplace!' He shook his head.

When we returned home our suspicions grew. People were altogether too friendly and attentive. When we talked everybody listened respectfully, and if one of us dropped a flat joke they laughed uproariously as if it were the wittiest they had ever heard. Or they offered us a smoke or a drink. Something was very wrong.

When we came home Pete was there. He closed the door behind us and said excitedly: 'It's all over now, the whole town knows about it, everybody's talking about it! And now they just sit back and watch and wait for you to make a move. When you start out to stake the whole gang will be right behind you. Early this morning Ole Knutson came to me and said that you had found tin near Spruce River and wanted me to go there right now with him. Some are already preparing to go and wait for you there. And look at all those planes down by the shore! You'll see, they won't go anywhere before you leave, and then they'll follow and land in the same spot as you. You won't have time to stake anything before the bush is full of men!'

Pete was desperate and worried sick. But we were angry and anxious too. We eyed each other and Magnus, who was still in bed, suspiciously.

'Who the devil has been talking?' Albert posed the question.

Nobody replied, but Magnus, who now was awake, groaned pitifully something about being very sick and that one should never drink. We at once suspected who the culprit was, looked significantly at each other and waited silently for the sequel to these preliminaries.

By and by it came. Magnus moaned again and finally confessed in an abject voice that he had been in a poker game the night before and lost heavily. To appear unconcerned and bolster his own courage he had said that it did not matter, he had a mine. And when somebody had laughed and needled him, he had become angry and told them he had a mine where the ore ran 70 per cent tin, and that they would find out in a week or two. Praise God he had not disclosed more about it than that it was near Spruce River.

None of us had the heart to berate the now very remorseful Magnus, but the damage was done. We were the centre of interest and our every move was watched. And as the day wore on a plane and at least two boats headed for Spruce River. It was obvious that we had to do something quick before someone found our showing. Our pits could be easily seen from the air and our one claim was no protection at all; it would only show people that they had found our mine. We had to return there at once.

We chartered a plane to take us out the next morning. Pete was coming with us as an equal partner. But before we went to bed Albert said: 'I'm going to tell Frank and Bill to be ready when we come back. I'd sooner give them a chance of good ground than some of those goddamn hangers-on!' He walked off.

The plane was loaded and ready at seven o'clock the next morning and the whole company climbed aboard. Albert marked the spot on the map where we were going and showed the pilot the best place to land. We took off.

An hour later we were circling the spot preparatory to landing when Joe suddenly grabbed my arm and pointed. About one mile west of our creek—just beyond the limits of the ground we had prospected—a large area was yellow from rust. On the hillside there were clusters of rocks and an outcrop that shone dark reddish brown.

'Boy!' I exclaimed. 'We missed something!'

Joc nodded. 'Uhuh, we better stake that.'

As the plane at our request made an additional circle we gazed fascinated out the windows. The ground around the rusty area was easy to see from the air because a forest fire a few years before had cleared it of all vegetation. Only the black skeletons of dead spruce remained.

We landed and boiled a quick cup of tea while we discussed the new situation and changed our plans. Albert, Magnus and Pete would start staking at once at least eight additional claims around the original showing, which was nearer the lake and thus easier to find, while Joe and I would prospect the new place. If we thought it good we would stake nine claims on it. We would decide later about staking more. Then to work. As Joc and I tore off through the bush we heard the chopping of our partners' axes as they started to cut corner-posts.

The new find lay on a slope near a little lake, and as soon as we got there and dug into the outcrop we saw stuff quite similar to that which we already had. Sulphide-bearing boulders lay in plain view in several places. Joe and I ran excitedly from one to another trying to find the richest and attempting to determine strike and dip.

Then I froze on the spot. A familiar hum reached my ears. Even as we stood motionless and gazed at the sky, a plane came right for us and started circling for a landing near the camp. Someone had followed us. Either they had figured out the location or seen our plane take off. No matter, they were here. The rush was on.

Dropping everything else Joc and I started staking. One of us walked ahead with a compass and paced the distance, the other came behind cutting and blazing the boundary line. As soon as we came to the corner we started hewing out corner posts and scribbling location notices on them. We had not cut two claim-lines before another plane arrived. We hardly glanced up; we only increased our pace.

But as we went on I wondered. How had these people found the location so fast? Magnus, who had let the cat out of the bag, had

sworn that he had mentioned only Spruce River, and that was a large area. Moccasin telegraph must have been at work.

The moccasin telegraph is an inexplicable and mysterious phenomenon, but very real. And it is surprisingly efficient at times. It spreads news through this land of lakes and forests with a speed and accuracy that is astonishing.

When something happens in a remote and isolated corner, it is often known hundreds of miles away within a few days and in such detail that it would do credit to the radio.

For instance, when Harms had killed Anthony, an old Indian told Ait Englund about it away out on the Barren Lands barely a week later. The distance was so great that even the fastest dog-team could not have covered it in that time. In the same way incidents have been told in the forts, which the participants believed entirely unknown to all outsiders. When they themselves were going to tell about them they found to their amazement that they were already known in detail.

The moccasin telegraph is, as mentioned, a mysterious thing; it sometimes smacks of wizardry. It is in some way related to instinct and the Indians' uncanny skill in finding game or being on the spot when a moose has been killed or the caribou arrive.

It had been at work now. There was no other explanation for the fast spreading of the news.

We fell to with renewed energy; the race was on. The axes rose and fell, their blades glinting with every swing, the trees tumbled like soldiers hit by bullets. The lines grew and clusters of corner posts appeared like mushrooms after rain. Hour after hour we toiled; legs and backs ached, feet stumbled, the sun beat mercilessly down on naked arms and faces in the shadowless fire-killed bush, and the barren soil, dry as snuff, reflected the heat like an oven. With every step and every falling tree ashes whirled up, blackened faces and clothes, clogged mouths and noses and made the eyes smart. Burned branches tore our clothes and raked our skins. The perspiration flowed into the scratches until they were sore and swollen. But we hurried on. Faster, faster; others will get ahead of you if you don't hurry. Hurry! Their voices and the sound of their axes already echoed in the hills. They were staking all around us.

Dead tired, we stumbled to the tent late that night for a few hours' sleep, while others were still working. As we prepared our supper and went to bed, the crash of falling trees sounded clearly in the still night.

At daybreak we were up again. Without any rest except for lunch, we drove ourselves that day too; blazing, cutting, hewing, walking and piling up rocks around the corner posts. Then at last the final post was driven into the ground and we sat down for a rest, a drink of cool water and a smoke.

Only then did we notice how tired we were. The way back seemed endless, as we staggered to the tent with aching muscles and stiff wobbly knees. But we were happy as we sat down for supper; we had the ground we wanted. Others could have the rest. We did not care who.

Only Albert was cross. He said that at least a score of men had come to the area and among them there was not one whom he had wanted to have a share of the good ground. Joe and I hardly listened as we rolled into our sleeping bags. I was asleep in a minute.

Goldfields received us like conquering heroes. We were swamped with questions, our samples were handled reverently, and those who were not yet in on the rush clustered around us asking where to go and what to look for. Our geological dissertations were listened to with respect and we sunned ourselves in the glory of success. For once Albert had the chance to parade his most complicated terms and theories to a really appreciative audience. How he loved it.

Then the bubble burst. The assays came. 'Au. 0.06 oz./ton; Ag. 0.2 oz./ton; Cu. 1.2 per cent; Fe . . .' read the best. The analysis showed all sorts of other elements in varying quantities, among others a trace of tin, but not enough of anything to give our find commercial value. The letter ended with the usual advice about the possibilities of the showing and about the value of further work and sampling. The assays of our other samples were similar, but poorer. There was not even enough copper to make the stuff valuable.

We were silent. Pete looked a bit foolish as he left with a curt

goodbye and disappeared. He was not seen in town for weeks. The rest of us were common people again. Magnus returned to his sweetheart and his beer barrel in Cannery, and one morning Albert and Joe were also gone. I was alone again, poorer in money but richer in experience and with a bitter taste in my mouth. But time would cure that! And where in the world had Pete got that tin?

The last blow was yet to come. One day there was a letter in the mail from Athona. They had suspended work on Piche, and would thus also discontinue the payments. The Sucker Bay district had proved poorer than expected. The deposits were spotty and the average gold content too low. All the other companies had already abandoned it.

For the second time Sucker Bay had experienced a period of prominence, and for the second time it had been abandoned. Soon it was as quiet and lonely among its hills as when I was first there. Only the grey, slowly withering cabins, the rusting boilers on Dardier's Island, and Piche's old tunnel, blocked by falling rock, remained of a past greatness. Herds of caribou again trotted unscathed over the ice, a lone fox sniffed around the camps and minks crawled through the pits. The high hills brooded over their hidden minerals.

I had had enough of gold, Goldfields and gold rushes. I left town and went out to see Pete, who lived on the north shore of Beaverlodge Lake; to tell him about Piche. With him I would not have to hear any more about gold for a while.

I found Pete at home with his cabin full of rock samples and minerals and himself full of enthusiasm. My news did not worry him at all. He took it almost as if it did not concern him.

'I expected it,' he said. 'But that's all right, because now I have something really big. If it's as good as I think, it's bigger than Goldfields. Look!' He held out some samples glittering with sulphides.

I looked listlessly at his rocks, and his enthusiasm just increased the bitter taste in my mouth. I did not want to talk or hear of finds and mines. But Pete did not seem to notice. He chatted eagerly on. 'Look, Erik, I'll give you the first chance, if this turns out to be

good. I found this on my Acc group, right on the shore of Acc Lake, only a mile away. I'll cut you in for 20 per cent if you help me work it. What do you say?"

I shook my head and fled to get away from more geology. My canoe was loaded and I was ready to push off, when Pete came running and gave me several bags of samples, that he wanted sent outside for assay.

With heavy heart I turned the bow of the canoe and paddled slowly in the warm summer night out on the wide lake. The sun was setting, the blank mirror of the water before me was a continuation of the sky; the far shore was only a narrow lilac band that cut it in two.

I landed at a point and camped. Almost until midnight I sat by my camp-fire and looked out over the lake. Nature finally had its effect. The wonderful play of colour, the smell of pine needles and the mild soothing air dispersed my depression. But when I went to bed I had made a decision. I was finished with gold. I would return to good, honest trapping.

Pete's prediction that on his Acc group he had something bigger than Goldfields proved true years later, when he himself had lost faith and moved away. Acc Lake and the Acc Lake mine are now household words in mining circles. Where Pete looked for gold now stands the head-frame of one of the country's richest uranium producers.

Pete himself is forgotten. When I visited Uranium City and the Eldorado camp a few years ago, nobody had heard of Pete Larson, and only the decayed bottom logs of his neat and homey cabin remained on the shore. The tall pines surrounding it had been cut down, and the once orderly clearing was littered with branches, kitchen refuse, boxes, bags, rusty tin cans and other signs of 'civilized living' in the bunkhouses a hundred feet away.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN I returned to Goldfields two months later it was fall. The yellow and orange of aspen and birch contrasted sharply with the dark-green conifers and the cold blue water. Ponds and small lakes already carried a thin skin of ice. Winter was coming, it was high time to leave for the bush. Freezeup would soon stop all travel.

I was going to stay only long enough to pick up my trapping outfit, and, if possible, sell my cabin. Goldfields had recently been zoned, and I had found that my cabin was situated in 'the best' residential area. I had received some offers for it; one especially good. If that offer still held I would sell.

With the proceeds from my cabin, my savings and what I would make on trapping during the winter, I would go outside the next spring. Except for a scant two months one summer I had been in the North for six years. If trapping turned out exceptionally well, I could perhaps even afford a trip to Europe. Such thoughts were going through my mind as I got out of the boat and walked to my cabin.

When I got there it was not empty as I had expected. Magnus was there and the cabin itself was a mess. Stacks of plates, glasses and beer bottles, and pots and pans with dried remnants of food, elbowed each other for room on the table. Bottle corks and wrappers, cigarette packages, butts, match-boxes, magazines and other trash littered the floor. It had not been cleaned or even swept for weeks. And judging by all the dirty dishes, nobody had washed even a cup for two months.

A little shame-faced, Magnus explained that he had returned from a prospecting-trip a few days before and found a couple of

complete strangers, who had broken open a window, living there. After kicking them out he had moved in himself.

'I was going to sweep out some of this junk, but I needed a drink first,' he grinned.

He did not need to explain further. Judging from the half-dozen empty 'crocks' and beer cases, he had made a trip to the liquor store and then one more and after that still some more. And, still judging from the signs, he had had plenty of company while the wares were being consumed.

Cleaning beer cases and magazines from one bunk, I made room for my packsack and bed-roll. A cursory examination revealed that although the strangers had been dirty, they had been honest. Nothing was missing. Resolving to clean up the mess first thing in the morning I went to bed.

The next morning I rose early, made a fire in the stove, cursing when I found it brimful of ashes, and sat down to write letters. My correspondence had been sadly neglected these past few months.

When Magnus awoke we took one look at all the dirt and decided to have a substantial breakfast before starting the house-cleaning. We went down to the nearest restaurant.

Sitting on high stools by the counter, we were wolfing our ham and eggs, when the cook burst out of the kitchen. 'Your place is on fire, Erik!' he shouted.

In a wink we were at the window. A sheet of flame licked the whole front of my cabin, and thick smoke welled through the door. Neighbours were rushing around trying to save what they could.

When we got there, one look told me that there was little chance of saving anything. Magnus ran to the window and broke a pane in an attempt to snatch his bed-roll from the bunk beside it, but was forced back with his hands burned by the flames that shot out through the hole. With a long stick I managed to hook my rifle, which stood against the wall just inside the door, before I too was compelled to retreat.

The cabin was lost. We had to concentrate on saving what we could from the lean-to shed at the back, and managed to throw

out most of the stuff or pass it to waiting hands outside. Then the fire shot through the cracks in vicious jets. We tumbled out singed and choking. A minute later the fire was so hot that we could not get within fifty feet of it.

I watched for a minute. Then I walked back to the restaurant and finished my ham and eggs. There was nothing I could do, and I did not want to look at the fire.

Afterwards I went to the hotel and rented a room. Now there was no question of selling my cabin; nobody wanted an empty lot. I need no longer concern myself with any trips outside.

In the afternoon I walked back to the cabin site. A few black fragments of logs, two twisted bed springs, some crooked nails and pieces of buckled tin, and an axe without a handle lay on the red earth. Somebody had lifted a frying pan and my mortar on to a nearby rock.

While I piled up the stuff we had saved from the lean-to, Magnus joined me. He, too, had lost many things, though most of his belongings including his dog-team were still safe at Cannery. But he had little money.

Most of my trapping outfit had been in the shed and had thus been saved and my money was still in the bank. But the money would go in replacing what I had lost. My dogs I had given away that summer.

When we had assessed our possibilities we concluded that the best solution for both of us was to go trapping together. With our pooled resources we had just enough for a small but adequate two-man outfit. But we would have to leave at once if we wanted to get out before freeze-up. The lakes here were already partly covered by ice, and farther north it would be worse. So we chartered a plane for the next day and bought sleeping bags, clothes and enough food to last us until Christmas. Then we carried everything down to the airways shed to be loaded the next morning.

The morning was grey and blustery. Fog and low clouds chased each other over the hills, only occasionally letting a bleak sun through. The peaks of Beaverlodge Mountain and other high hills were powdered white with hoar-frost and red and yellow

leaves of birch and poplar flitted into the water around us. The lake was gloomy and choppy.

Our first stop was Cannery where we were to pick up Magnus' outfit. Islands and points flashed past like ghosts as we flew along only a few feet above the lake. Descending clouds forced us nearer the frothing white-caps. We hopped over a neck of land and settled in the calmer water by the settlement.

'I sure hope this stuff lifts by noon, else we'll never get over those hills,' said Jim, the pilot, and looked at the heavily shrouded land. I looked too.

The clouds were lifting a little overhead, but to the north they moved sluggishly, clinging stubbornly to the black, spruce-covered ridges. The anaemic disc of the sun sometimes spread a little light on them, making them blacker by contrast afterwards. It looked bad.

Magnus' outfit and dogs were soon aboard, but it was afternoon before Jim said: 'All right, let's try it, maybe it's better beyond the hills.'

We rose quickly through a hole in the curtain, which now hovered some four hundred feet above water. When we were through there was white fluff on all sides, above which protruded the tops of some high hills. Every now and then the dim outlines of lakes below showed in the rifts. Soon we would be over Tazin Lake. Then there was an unbroken blanket of clouds. We could not see what lay below and did not dare go down to look. The hills that showed above it were reminders of what lurked in the fluff perhaps only a few feet beyond our sight.

That trip I shall never forget. Cruising around over the clouds and over what we hoped was Tazin Lake, we looked for openings through which we could get down under again. A few times we thought there were thinner places and made trips down, trips during which I felt a chill down my spine and a creepy feeling in my neck, and zoomed right up again. Jim's eyes were anxious, but his smile was reassuring when he said:

'It's lucky I took some extra gas along for just this sort of eventuality. But if we don't see a crack in ten minutes we're going back.'

Magnus and I said nothing. We just stared down. Five minutes went by, six, seven, and still no break. Then there was some water; I saw dimly some white-caps and streaks of foam. I was about to point when Jim said: 'Hang on' Down we went.

Tazin Lake was below us and the clouds not more than a hundred feet above it. We landed in the lee of an island and looked at our maps. It was plain by now that to reach the lake which was to have been our goal would be impossible. To the north we could not hop over any more ranges of hills. There was no clearance at all. Besides, the lakes to the north were almost one thousand feet higher than Lake Athabaska. They would be shrouded in fog and possibly already frozen. There remained only the possibility of flying up Tazin River as far as we could. We settled for that.

Scooting along just under the clouds we zoomed up the valley. The delta flashed past and the valley narrowed, the hills on both sides came closer and closer, and the overcast forced us down. Finally we flew through a narrow canyon that to Magnus and myself looked barely wide enough for the plane. It was like boring through a tunnel, a tunnel coated with white wool. The trees, the grass, the Labrador tea, even the rocks were white with frost, a mute reminder that the clouds had only recently rested on the very ground itself. All the ponds and bays along the river were frozen over.

We passed falls and rapids with frothing waves that seemed to reach out for us and for every mile we gained the clouds forced us a little lower. I was by now ready to tell Jim to land as soon as he saw a chance, but one look at his grim face silenced me. Besides, where could we land here? We had to push on. We could not even turn; the space was too narrow. We zoomed on, now only about fifty feet above the water.

At last the country began to open. The hills receded. Only the clouds did not lift. We were flying just above the tree-tops when a lake hove into sight. I recognized it even without the map. We were still thirty-five miles from our original destination, but this lake was wide open.

Jim looked at it and the clouds beyond to the northeast. Then he turned to me: 'I'm afraid this is it, Erik. Do you want to stop here or go back to Goldfields? Can't take a chance on going any farther.'

I looked at Magnus. He nodded, pointing downward. I said: 'No, not back to Goldfields, Jim. This is good enough.'

'O.K.,' said Jim. He grinned. 'I'll credit you for the remaining mileage.'

With that he went down. No approach was needed, we were practically down on the lake already. We touched water. Jim cut the engine and veered off toward a sandy beach to the left. The plane slowly coasted the last stretch, then the pontoons scraped.

When we had unloaded and tied the dogs to trees, I thought of something. 'Say, Jim, how are you going to get back?'

'Oh, I'll wait a little and if it doesn't lift I'll go right over.' He pointed south. 'There's a big lake to shoot for. I'll go by the clock and come down when I'm far enough. It's O.K. without passengers.'

So he did. After about half an hour, during which there was no change, he hopped in and took off. The plane was practically hanging by its propeller as it disappeared in the clouds. We listened intently until its steady drone died away, far to the south. We were alone.

The beach was crescent-shaped and some five hundred feet in length. After a few feet it ascended sharply and flattened into a level sand-plain with tall straight jackpines. We had all the timber we needed for a cabin. A creek entered the lake a little to the east, and a mile or two to the north, beyond the sand-flat, rose dark spruce-covered hills. It was a pretty spot; we were content.

We quickly pitched our tent, set up our stove in it and cut some firewood.

Magnus' dogs, feeling doughty and brave, sniffed critically at the trees to which they were tied, cocked their legs, scratched and kicked expertly, and growled menacingly at each other. When either Magnus or I came near, they stopped and looked at us in

anticipation and whined. It was suppertime; where were the fish?

'Oh, shut up!' said Magnus. 'You'll be fed tomorrow!'

It was as if they had understood. Visibly abashed and with ears wilting Cap and Whitey started circling and finally lay down with their noses under their tails and snoozed, but in such a position that one eye was clear and toward the tent. Just by lifting a lid they could follow what was going on and be ready in case Magnus was just fooling. Major and Bob thought he was. They also lay down but continued to whine piteously whenever we came near. Only Chuck was adamant. He sat straight up and barked demandingly every now and then. 'I want my supper. Come on. It's getting late.'

Yes; the dogs had to be fed. Grabbing our axes we cut down a couple of big dry jackpines, carried them to the shore and spiked together a raft. Two crude paddles were quickly formed from piles and shortly after we manoeuvred out on the lake. There we set two 100-yard fish-nets. By morning we should have dog-feed.

After supper we went out to select a site for our cabin. As we were driving pegs to mark the corners in the ground Magnus stopped. 'Look!' he said.

It was clearing. The clouds overhead were getting thinner as they drifted eastward and a blue strip of sky in the west was rapidly growing. The sun, which was still above the horizon, came out. Its slanting rays painted the trees orange and the frost began to melt.

'Just my usual luck,' Magnus said. 'That's the way it always is with me. When I want to go someplace it's either too cloudy or too windy, and when I portage it's too hot. Or the flies are worse than anywhere in the whole country!'

I looked at Magnus and was about to laugh. But he was not smiling. His eyes were serious and there was a bitter line around his mouth. The mirth died on my lips.

The morning dawned warm and clear. The sun shone brightly from a sky washed blue and clean of dirty clouds. And it stayed bright for several days. Now we could have flown to the North Pole and back if we had wished.

After breakfast I sharpened my axe, swung it on my shoulder and walked—almost ran—to the spot where the cabin was to be, and attacked a tall straight pine. As I chopped I felt the clean air stream into my lungs. I expanded my chest, and the fresh pungent odour of pitch and turpentine filled my nostrils. It was great to be out in the bush again, to watch the sharp blade flash into the soft wood and the cleft across the trunk grow as if by itself.

The first tree crashed to the ground. I peeled off my shirt. Then I climbed the tree, cut off the top and started on the next one. As I paused for a breather, resting my axe on a trunk, I heard the measured beat of Magnus' axe.

That night, when the sun set, we had cut all the logs needed for the walls and piled them up in the clearing, ready for building. It was late October; we had to hurry. By the middle of November at the latest all our traps should be out and set, if we wanted to catch enough fur for a real stake. The time between freeze-up and Christmas was the best part of the trapping season. During that period more than half of the winter's furs were caught.

It was suppertime, but first the dogs had to be fed. All afternoon we had heard sorrowful howls and whines interspersed with demanding barks from the shore where they were tied. Now when we came back to the tent, the dogs were sitting upright, following our least movement with entreating eyes. And when we put an empty packing box on the raft and pushed off they went wild. An indescribable clamour broke loose. They hopped straight up as far as their chains permitted or ran crazily around the trees to which they were tethered, barked, howled and bit at the branches in their way. The noise echoed over the water and followed us out to the nets.

Fishing was very poor. Although the whitefish were spawning at that time of the year there were only three or four in our two nets. Plus one big pike, or jackfish as they were commonly known in the North. There was hardly enough for three dogs and we had five. Besides, Magnus and I also had counted on fish for supper.

We were downcast when we returned and divided the fish evenly among the hungry dogs. The dogs gulped down their fish in two shakes of the tail and sat down to wait for more.

We opened a can of beans for our own supper and pondered the situation. This was an unexpected turn of events. Most lakes in the North abound in fish, but occasionally one finds some that are very poor, because there is not enough food for them. Was ours like that? 'Maybe we should move the nets up to the mouth of the river,' I suggested.

Magnus nodded. 'Yeah, we'll try that. It might be good enough there to keep us going until the caribou come.'

It was dusk when we reached the upper end of the lake and set our nets anew in an eddy just below a rapid where Tazin River entered our lake. This looked like a good spot, the best in the whole lake. But it was far from camp, an hour's paddling with the unwieldy raft, and entailed a lot of surplus work just when we were busy and had little time to spare.

We were thinking of all these things when we stroked homeward in the darkness and, guided by the barking of our dogs, landed by the camp. If fishing did not improve we would have to waste more time on hunting. We needed some fish also for fox and mink bait—soon, too, because the fish had to be rotten and stinking to lure a fox. Minks were less particular, but they also preferred fish to other bait.

The following days we worked busily from early morning until dusk and the camp rose quickly, layer by layer. It was a race with time. Our fishing did not improve, there was barely enough in our nets to feed the dogs. And, although it hurt to see their hungry looks and increasingly lean frames and to listen to their almost continuous lament, we steeled ourselves and took out a few fish even from our small catches, and dug them down in the sand for fox-bait. And while we were building, our loaded rifles were near us, leaning against the trees. Frequently we stopped and anxiously scanned the surroundings for signs of game. It was high time for the caribou to arrive from the tundra.

The great migration usually reached that part of the land toward the end of October. One day the country would be quiet and peaceful with nothing marring the stillness. The next it would teem with life as herd upon herd wandered through, pawing the muskegs to black mire, lacing the sand-flats with tracks and filing

through the valleys in endless rows, swimming across lakes and rivers in herds, hundreds strong, their horns forming thickets resembling hedges of dried thorn-bush. The bawling of calves would blend with the lowing of does and the barking bellow of the rutting bucks.

Then there would be feasting in this land of famine. Wolves, foxes and ravens would follow the herds, and the people would kill enough deer to last them and their dogs for months to come. There would be broiled brisket and fat delicious tongue; they would crack marrow bones, make dry meat and tan hides for clothing. There would be great happy smiles everywhere.

But when the caribou failed to come there was famine indeed. Moodily the men would tighten their belts and desperately hunt for other game ; the wives would silently boil fish, scraps of meat, squirrels, muskrats, porcupines and fish-ducks, and even pieces of hide for their starving families. And the dogs, getting thinner and more vicious every day, would keep up a continuous dismal howl or slink around the tents in search of forgotten scraps of food to lessen the pain in their shrunken bellies. Fish would then be the last resort, and during the bitter northern winter fish is not enough to sustain more than a spark of life in fat-starved bodies. Fear and misery would settle upon the land.

This spectre now hung over Magnus and me. Winter was near and we needed a more substantial shelter than the tent would afford us; but we also needed meat desperately, not only for our dogs, but for ourselves. The supplies we had brought with us would not suffice for more than a month unless we were able to augment them with game.

One evening, when we had completed the walls and only the roof remained, Magnus said: 'You know, Erik, we've got to go hunting. I was watching the dogs this afternoon. They're acting sort of funny, sniffing and looking across the lake. There must be caribou or maybe a moose around.'

'Uhuh,' I replied. 'Tell you what. I'll go out and look around, if you stay and finish the roof. No use us both going unless I see signs of something.'

We agreed on that, and when we had gone to bed after our

slim supper of beans, bannock and tea, and lay in our beds, Magnus suddenly sat up. 'Listen, Erik!'

Out of the darkness from some faraway hilltop came the drawn-out thread-thin howl of a hungry wolf-pack. It hung in the still air as if suspended by a thread. One could hardly tell when the sound ended and the imagination of hearing it began. A while later it was repeated so far away that it was hardly perceptible.

'There must be caribou somewhere in the country. Those wolves are following them. They are a sure sign.'

Magnus was right, I thought. Wolves always followed the big herds, often staying near the outside edges but never far from them. Yes, there must be caribou in the country.

In high spirits I started out the following morning. The air was crisp and the sky clear and a cold wind blew from the north. A little snow had fallen during the night, covering the ground and newly formed ice with a half-inch of fluffy white. I had to break ice for some fifty feet before the raft took land on the opposite shore of the lake. Then I struck out in the direction where the wolf calls had beckoned the night before. Beyond the shore was an undulating sand plain, occasionally broken by a draw, where a creek flowed, a devil's acre of jumbled rocks, or shallow depressions where spruce and tamarack grew in deep sphagnum moss. On the sand-plain itself jackpines stood widely spaced as if in a park, their gnarled limbs stretching out far over the lichen-covered ground. The ground was hard, but the brittle lichens broke crisply when I stepped on them. This was good country for hiking.

As I headed straight east, only occasionally making a detour around some little lake, or a steep drumlin, I saw in the snow the fine print of a field mouse, the parallel exclamation marks made by a fleeing rabbit or the well-worn trail made by a colony of squirrels as they dashed from the safety of one spruce to another. Here a porcupine had walked his unhurried way between a succulent birch and his den; there a nervous fox had been mincing along in search of rabbit or ptarmigan. A mink had hopped along a creek, and a partridge, suddenly aroused from its sleep, had made a squawking dash for the nearest safe pine branch.

Foxes were obviously numerous this year, there were also spoors of mink and marten. In a pond I saw a fresh beaver house—one, that is, where beavers were still living—and on the ice of a recently frozen slough there were the push-ups, breathing holes covered with balls of grass made by muskrats. And, as I already knew, wolves ranged over the land.

But when I arrived at the shore of a large lake, near noon, I had not seen a single caribou track. Whatever had caused the wolves to howl the night before, it was not caribou. There were none. These sandflats, covered with the lichen which they especially liked, would be the place to find them.

As I made a small fire and ate my lunch, I considered the situation. Since there were no caribou, I would have to find other game. But this sand-country was not a place for moose or bear. They liked tracts that had been burned over perhaps a dozen years before, where the moose would have plenty of birch and willow saplings for forage, and the bears would have berries to eat and windrows of fallen dead trees for their winter dens. Perhaps the country northwest of our camp would be a better place to hunt them.

During my return to the camp I saw no more sign of caribou than in the morning. They just had not come to our parts. Magnus was very quiet when I related my experiences. His despondency seemed to increase. But he agreed readily to my suggestion that I try my luck in the opposite direction the following day.

The land on our side of the river was rugged. After a mile of pine-covered sand-plain the hills started. Soon I was walking through deep spruce-growing valleys and over steep rock ridges with abrupt cliffs, and around narrow, clear lakes. My progress became much slower, especially when I reached country that had been burned some years before, where dead trees in jumbled piles barred my way. But my spirits rose, and I continued with eyes and ears open. This was moose country. If there were any moose in the whole land this was the spot for them.

But there were few signs. In one area I found a few heaps of moose dung, months, perhaps a year old, and no tracks at all. Not even old ones. When I had lunch at the shore of a large lake,

which barred my way to the northwest, I had seen little to encourage me.

In the afternoon I headed southwestward before returning home. In this way I would cover more country. My course would take me down to Tazin River some miles below our camp. From there I could find my way home, even in the dark if necessary.

It was getting late and the sun was low when I suddenly encountered bear tracks on the slope of a hill in the middle of an old burn. Soon there were many of them. They rambled all over and criss-crossed each other without apparent rhyme or reason. At times the beast had walked a long way on fallen logs, jumping from one to the other without touching the ground between, at other times he had dug in the ground and torn rotten stumps asunder to get at the ants in them. Some were quite fresh, possibly only hours old.

Eagerly, gun ready and enthusiasm soaring, I followed the freshest. Then I stopped. No, this was foolish; I would only scare bruin away this way. He was obviously searching for a spot to den up in for the winter. Or perhaps he had already picked one and was now 'casing the joint', going over the whole vicinity to make sure no dangers lurked there, doubling back time and again to confuse anyone attempting to track him. The less I disturbed him now, the surer I would be of finding him here later.

Magnus and I would return the next day with our dogs. I remembered that Magnus had told me that a couple of them were good bear dogs. I turned and walked briskly homeward. It had clouded over and was beginning to snow. Large wet flakes were slowly sailing down.

There was a dim light in the tent and the dogs greeted me with menacing barks and growls, but subsided when they recognized my voice.

Magnus lay in the tent on his bed. He turned over and groaned when I entered. Then he carefully eased himself up on one elbow.

'What's wrong, Magnus? Are you sick?'

'Slipped when I was packing a log. My back sort of kinked. And now it hurts like hell right here.' He placed his hand on the small of his back, just above the buttocks. 'Can't hardly move.'

I felt the spot he indicated. There was a hard lump, and he winced when I touched it. It looked bad, like a severe strain, I thought, as I rummaged in our pack-sacks for medicaments. But at least his back was not broken, he had been able to walk to the tent without any trouble.

There was a bottle of liniment. When I had soaked a pad with it and applied a tight bandage Magnus was able to sit up against some bags and boxes I piled behind him. But his awkward movements told me that he would be out of commission for some time.

While I cooked supper I told Magnus about the bear tracks. He brightened visibly. 'Gee, it would be fine if we could get him. Bears are nice and fat now after the berry season. Meat's good too. Damn it! Now I can't go out after him with you. My usual luck again.'

'That's O.K., Magnus. You said a couple of your dogs are good hunters. I'll take them along. We'll get him. It's not far, only about three miles from here.' I tried to sound as cheerful as I could, but I fooled neither Magnus nor myself. But he kept a stiff upper lip.

'That's right. Take Cap and Bob along, they'll find him for you. And maybe I'll feel better tomorrow.'

We ended the subject on that note. But when I had gone to bed after supper I lay awake for a long time. The future did not look bright. Even if I did get the bear, we still had much to do in a very short time. Besides the half-finished roof we had to make a door and windows and a floor for our cabin, get more meat and dog feed, and set all our traps. And we only had a little more than a week to do it in if we wanted our share of fur this season. I was worried when I fell asleep.

In the morning there was no time for worry. After breakfast I unleashed Cap and Bob, who immediately tore around the camp like streaks while their envious team-mates set up a clamour that would have made a boilermaker deaf. When Magnus had hobbled out and quietened them some, I whistled and set out. The two dogs followed obediently.

We made a beeline for the spot where I had seen the tracks. Cap, a sharp-eared, bushy-tailed, dark-grey husky, and Bob, a

long-legged, flop-eared and nondescript brown mongrel, ranged back and forth and were mostly out of sight. Only now and then they came back to me, just long enough to find out which way I was going and how far I had come. But after a mile or so when they tired of this they began to stay closer. Finally Bob was walking practically on my heels, his long red tongue hanging near the ground, and occasionally sticking his blunt nose into my free hand, just to show that he was with me. Both he and Cap, who walked ahead, gave my rifle an occasional glance. They knew what we were out for; they were ready to do their part.

As soon as we were on the hillside, where I had seen the first bear-track, Bob and Cap needed no urging. After the first smell they sniffed busily around, following one tangled skein after another. When I spoke softly to them they stopped only to look at me and wag their tails as if to tell me not to worry. If it was bear I was after, they would find him for me.

I walked slowly on. The number of tracks increased and now I caught only an occasional glimpse of a wagging tail among the trees as the dogs, hot on a fresh scent, tore around. Both of them appeared near a pile of large windfalls and sniffed and snorted eagerly. Bob lifted his nose high. He stood dead still for a moment, his nose dilating.

Then he was off like a shot, Cap right behind. I too started to run. In a second they were out of sight. This time there was no hesitation. They had caught the bear's scent.

I had run only a few hundred feet when suddenly all hell seemed to break loose up front. There was a roar followed by shrill yelps, crashes and frenzied barking. Cap's high voice blended with Bob's deep hound hoots and the apparently surprised and very angry bruin's vehement growls. They were only a few hundred feet away, judging from the sound. Stopping only to push a shell into the breach and adjust the safety catch, I ran toward the trouble spot with pounding heart.

A minute later they came into sight. I was lucky. The bear had chosen a fairly open spot for his stand. His jet-black coat was shining in the sun as he flared with his paws and turned as quick as a cat at the dogs, who on opposite sides, barking like mad,

made fast dashes, stopping just short of his lunges. When he did not catch one of them he vented his vexation on a log, sending pieces of wood flying. He afforded a magnificent target as he occasionally stood up on his hind legs; his white fangs gleamed against the red mouth and tongue.

Panting I raised my rifle and lowered it again. I had to catch my breath before shooting. The bear turned to run when he saw me, but the dogs forced him to stop again after a few gallops. This time he was faster than they. Encouraged by my arrival Cap had gone too close. One lightning paw sent him flying. He got up again and attacked gamely though limping. Just as I raised the rifle I saw a red streak on his flank.

The bear roared and slumped down at the shot but was up again at once. Now he did not simply flail; he made straight for Cap, who frantically scrambled away. Bob was right at the bear's tail. As bruin stood up again to smack the injured dog I fired the second time. He stood suddenly still, as if somebody had grabbed his paw and arrested its movement. Then he melted to the ground, a limp sack.

I walked slowly nearer, my rifle ready. It was at once quiet. Only Bob's low growl as he, too, ventured closer disturbed the stillness. Cap lay on the ground licking his side.

After a good look which told me that the bear was dead I went to Cap. He lay down obediently and only whimpered a little when I touched his flank. There was a deep gash. Only one claw had reached him but the havoc it had caused was enough. The dog was bleeding profusely and two ribs showed through the slanting six-inch gash.

I felt the side lightly then a little harder. The dog did not whimper any louder as I did so. I relaxed. Apparently no broken ribs. A large flesh wound was bad enough, but that would heal soon if looked after. And Cap was already busy medicating it. My sympathy also plainly made him better. He sat up and licked my hand in thanks.

Bob was busy worrying bruin. He growled and tore and licked the blood that oozed out of a big wound in its head, where the expanding bullet had come out. My second shot had gone in

through the eye, crushed the skull and cut some large blood vessels. The first one had pierced the chest.

I started skinning and dressing the beast. It was an old male, weighing perhaps three hundred pounds. His shiny winter coat had just come out, under it was a thick layer of snow-white fat. We would get pounds and pounds of nice bear grease there. As I was cutting I threw scraps of meat and fat at the dogs. Cap limped around with his paw in the air and licked his wound but was not too sick to catch every piece I tossed at him.

It was afternoon when I had dressed the meat and hung it from the limbs of nearby trees and was ready to start home. Cap came right behind me, but Bob was loath to leave all the fat intestines behind. When eventually he came he was in no mood for running; his extended belly almost dragged on the ground and he pantied like a steam engine. His eyes were satisfied slits.

Magnus was lucky to have dogs like these. Among sleigh dogs few are anxious to tackle a bear. Usually they act as if bruin were not there when they see him, and if he makes a hostile movement they sometimes crowd around their master for safety. That is not very reassuring to a hunter who would like a bear steak, and would also like some moral support in getting it.

Walking homewards, I scouted the land ahead for an easy route in. The next day I would have to bring the meat home with the dog sleigh. I angled down toward the river where the terrain looked flatter. A valley with a creek flowing in it was leading that way.

I was perhaps halfway home when Bob suddenly let out a loud bark and bounded off. There was a crash on the hillside above us, and a large grey-brown shape emerged from a bluff and leaped up the slope in great strides. A moose! Its wide horns were for a moment silhouetted against the sky. Then it continued flowing smoothly over rocks and windfalls. I brought up my rifle and fired. The first shell had no effect. I pumped in a new shell and shot again and again. Still no slackening of its speed. The animal was several hundred yards away when it came in sight again for a moment. I fired again, more on a chance than in the hope of hitting. The moose lurched and dropped, but got up again, and came sliding and running down the hill right toward me, its right foreleg

swinging limply. I waited and pulled the trigger again. Click! The rifle was empty.

While I loaded again I watched the animal's progress through a corner of my eye. With a start I suddenly realized that it was not trying to escape, it was coming right for me, head high and nostrils flaring! Bob was now right on its heels, but doing little good, for his big meal slowed him down and the moose paid him little attention.

The bull was only two hundred feet away when I brought my rifle up again. The bullet struck him in the chest. He made one long leap, tumbled over down the hill and, with a heavy thump, slid to a stop against a big log, heaved once and lay still.

I walked slowly up to it. A nice fat bull; eight prongs on one horn and six on the other. Perhaps five or six hundred pounds of prime fat meat. Then I started laughing. Now we had meat for months. And that morning things had looked very glum indeed. There had been little food and little hope of getting any. I had been very lucky to get the bear, and then a big moose, twice its size, had practically fallen into my lap by pure chance. Feast or famine indeed!

It was dark when I had finished dressing the bull and started homeward again with the liver and tongue in my pack-sack. Tonight we would feast!

Progress was slow. Bob ran ahead and stopped occasionally to give me a look as if to inquire what was the matter with me, when I stumbled along, letting him find the way. Cap limped on behind me, sometimes whining for sympathy and stopping frequently to lick his wound. At times I stopped and patted him. It was hard for him to keep up, but he struggled gamely on.

When we arrived Magnus limped out.

'Christ, it sounded like a regular war over there. Did you get the bear? I was getting worried when you were so long. Them bears get mean sometimes when you wound them.'

Happily I told him about my hunt. Magnus' eyes lit up for the first time since he had come here, he looked happy. After examining Cap's wound he agreed that the dog would be as good as new again in a month. Rest and food would soon cure him.

When we had finished our supper of fresh moose liver, we turned in and lay in our beds and listened silently to the hiss of the kettle in which the tongue was cooking. The appetizing fumes from it tickled my nostrils when I, tired but content, dozed off. The spectre of starvation had receded.

CHAPTER XII

THE work on the cabin progressed quickly and soon we had the roof finished, and the door and windows in place, and were able to move in. Although Magnus' back still hurt and he was unable to lift anything heavy, he helped as well as he could, gathering moss, chinking the walls and hewing poles for bunks and benches and a table. Often I saw his face twisted in pain, but he never complained. Gamely he worked on, trying to do his share of the chores.

The dogs waxed fatter day by day on the nourishing meat. They no longer whined and howled but lay contented, surrounded by bones and chunks of meat, getting up occasionally to eat and growling perfunctorily when they thought a team-mate was trying to steal a bone.

Winter broke upon us. On the day we moved into our cabin it snowed heavily, and the morning after dawned clear and very cold. Smoky vapour rose from the water in the frigid, still air and patches of skin-ice formed on the calm surface, grew and joined and became continuous. By noon the whole lake was an unbroken mirror of glistening new ice. The next day I walked out and across the lake testing the ice with my axe. It was an inch and a half to two inches thick, quite strong enough to walk on. It was time to start trapping. When the ice holds a man, minks and foxes are prime, say the Chipewyan Indians.

We prepared feverishly and the next day we started up-river. Our sleigh was loaded with all it would hold, of traps, bait, food, dog food, camping equipment and tent, rifles and a stove. It was a heavy load for our four dogs, who were soft after their summer's idleness. Cap had to stay at home to nurse his wound. Since we expected to be gone several days we left him a big piece of moose

meat. He whined and howled as we left, but it seemed a half-hearted effort. He knew very well that he could not come along; he just tried to show his willingness to go. Also he hated to be left alone.

The first day the going was good. The river flowed here in easy meanderings through a country of sandplains and eskers. There were many points and islands and little rapids or spots with a strong current, where the water was still open. The river banks were lined with willow and alder and birch. On the plains beyond jackpine and spruce grew tall and bushy. This was fox country and numerous tracks testified to their abundance. Now that the lakes had frozen, the foxes had made trips out to the islands that had been inaccessible to them before. They searched there for food that could have floated ashore there and escaped the gulls and ravens. Also the ice afforded easier walking. Locally there were real trails along the shores.

Near the rapids there were occasional tracks of mink, but these were not plentiful. Mink love more rugged surroundings, falls and fast rapids that stay open all winter and where cavities under the ice give shelter against bad weather. An otter track, resembling that of an amateur skier, went straight up the river, dipping into open spots and continuing on. The otter was on a long trip; he was heading for better hunting grounds, so it was no use setting traps for him here.

Instead we made many sets for fox and occasionally one for mink near a likely-looking rapid. But we saved most of our traps for the country farther up the river.

The second day we struck a range of hills. The river frothed down over rapid after rapid, or hurtled down over ledges of jumbled boulders, or shot through a deep narrow canyon like a deep axe-cut in the solid rock. Here our progress became increasingly slow. I walked ahead, cutting a trail along the bank that sometimes was so steep that the dogs, sleigh and Magnus threatened to slide down into the drink. Sometimes we went over and around great heaps of tumble-down rocks, and sometimes we had to make long detours around hillocks and cliffs.

But here signs of mink were plentiful. This was a real home for them. We clambered up and down the river bank to the water's edge. There we built little pens of poles and spruce boughs with the trap in the opening and the bait, a piece of nice, putrid fish, farther in. And around we scattered smaller bits for a come-on.

We also ran into numerous marten tracks. Obviously a sizeable colony had survived the trappers here among these inaccessible hills. We licked our chops in anticipation as we baited our traps with fish and catnip oil. Marten are valuable and easy to catch. Just for this reason they are extinct in many areas.

All day we climbed and snaked our way through this hill country; sometimes I helped the dogs by pushing the sleigh up the slopes, sometimes by walking ahead and pulling on the head-rope. Then as suddenly as they had begun the ranges ended. An undulating pine-covered land lay before us.

Here we struck caribou. Out on the ice of the first large lake above the uppermost fall a herd of some thirty animals lay ruminating. The herd watched us unconcerned as we approached, our dogs pulling and whining eagerly, while Magnus and I tried to steady the sleigh and at the same time pull our rifles from the load.

A few of the younger caribou got up and came to meet us with mincing steps, occasionally stopping for a better look. Then they jumped straight up and galloped off, and the rest of the herd, suddenly coming to life, followed. In a wide circle they ran around us, heads high, hoofs spraying snow in glittering arcs.

Our team also broke into a gallop, trying eagerly to catch up. Magnus hung on, cursing and trying to get them to stop. I threw myself off and kneeled in the snow, taking a bead on the nearest beast. The shot went home, the animal fell and the dogs made straight for it. There Magnus managed to stop them and started shooting too. The animals milled confusedly around, making aimless dashes for the shore and returning again. Magnus felled two in succession, I got one more, and a couple of wounded ones lay down. Suddenly the herd turned again and galloped furiously

past us only about hundred feet away and escaped into the bush unscathed.

Magnus and I each walked cautiously toward one of the wounded caribou. Mine let me come within three hundred feet before making an attempt to rise. I fired again and it slumped. Magnus walked right up to his, and crushed its skull with a blow of the axe as it tried feebly to rise.

I walked over to him. He looked up from his work with a great smile on his face. No comment was necessary. The caribou were here. We had lots of dog-feed and excellent prospects of more. From now on we would not need to haul any with us, we would get our meat on the trail. The caribou had arrived.

Later we found caribou in other parts of our hunting grounds. The high ranges of hills and the burned area just north of our cabin had probably deflected the herds, which had migrated around them on their way south, leaving an island of blank country round the cabin. Thus the howling of the wolves that one night was explained. The caribou were in the country all right, but because of the lake which had barred my way on my hunting trip, I had stopped short of finding them. They had probably been plentiful just a few miles farther.

The following day I was in familiar country. Here I had trapped some years previously and knew every lake, rapid and portage. In our tent that night I could draw a detailed map for Magnus. With its help he could now find his way alone and we could split up for the day, each following his own trail and meeting at night in a previously agreed camping spot, or in one of the cabins I had built before.

Setting off on snow-shoes with my pack-sack full of traps and my rifle on my shoulder, I walked up along a tributary to Tazin River, while Magnus went up the main branch with the team. We would meet at one of my old outcamps that night.

The day was cloudy and mild for that time of the year. Heavy snow had fallen during the night and my snow-shoes sank into the fluffy flakes almost without sound; every tree I touched sent down a flurry. Tracks of game were hidden under the new blanket. But

I still set traps in likely-looking places; in spots that I knew from times past to be good for catching fur.

It was late afternoon when I reached a bend in the little river. From here it was only a few miles over some lakes and portages to the cabin on Tazin River where Magnus would be. I struck out across country.

I was just coming to the shore of the first lake, when I stopped short in my tracks. A small herd of caribou was fleeing across the ice in full panic. Then I saw something else. Less than a hundred feet from the near shore a lone caribou was struggling weakly with two whitish grey shapes, and even as I watched a third emerged from the bush and streaked toward them. I looked out over the lake and sure enough there were two more coming to join the feast. Wolves at a fresh kill!

Slowly and silently I unslung my rifle, waited until the last two had joined their comrades and took one long step into an opening from which I had an unobstructed view of the scene. The beasts were only about one hundred yards away, but they had not discovered me. I blessed the snow which softened the sound of my footfalls. This was the first time I had witnessed that of which I had so often seen the silent evidence in the snows of northern lakes; a wolf-pack at its kill. As I sank on to one knee and took aim I heard their low snarls and grunts as they tore at the steaming, fresh carcass.

The first shot sped. Without stopping to observe its effect, I pushed further shells into the breach as I fired again and again. One wolf turned and attacked its neighbour with a vicious growl, another fell over but rose again and drawing the right conclusion from the sound of the shot dragged itself toward the shore. I fired again. Another dropped: the one that had been attacked by the wounded fellow. While the latter was still shaking the dead wolf I drilled him too. The remaining two seemed to melt away as they streaked toward the bush. As they disappeared I sent a bullet after them, but with no visible result. Three motionless shapes remained side by side; the dead caribou and its killers. Farther out the wounded wolf was still struggling to get away.

I jumped up and started running after him as fast as I could.

At the start I gained on him, but then he discovered me and using his remaining strength loped off. The gap between us widened. I sent another two shots after him. He fell, but came up again and continued on three legs.

Searching for shells in my pocket and reloading almost on the run I followed. Now he was failing and I was getting closer. He began turning his head sideways to watch my progress as he limped on and a low vicious growl emerged between his fangs. Finally he stopped to face me, his whole countenance contorted into a devilish snarl. I stopped too, and let him have it. He still growled as he fell.

My rifle ready I edged up and stopped twenty feet away. He was quite dead, a huge white beast with a dark grey stripe on the back and jet-black claws, nose and tail tip. One of my shots had nicked his leg, another had gone through his neck and the third right through his chest, coming out through the belly. I started to skin him.

It was slow and awkward work. When I had finished with the three and stowed the heavy fresh skins in my pack-sack, which was bulging and seemed to weigh a ton, it was almost dark. I struck out across the lake, the straps cutting into my shoulders and my snow-shoes sinking almost to the ice. I still had some miles to go.

An hour later I was stumbling along in pitch darkness. It was overcast. The spruce showed only as dim ghosts and the snow was all the same dim grey, hiding all stumps, rocks and hollows. I was beginning to tire and pitched on my face several times. What was worse, I was not sure of my direction. In the darkness I saw no landmarks, and the clouds hid the stars and the moon.

As I stopped to debate with myself whether to go on or camp for the night where I was, the sound of faraway falls came to my ears. I reflected. The only rapids I knew of in the vicinity were those in the Tazin River a few miles below the cabin toward which I was heading. I wet my finger and held it up. There was a faint breeze blowing from that direction. I decided to continue; it could not be more than a couple of miles farther to my cabin.

Keeping the sound of the rapids to the right of me I felt my way ahead, every so often taking a tumble as my snow-shoe caught on some unseen twig or a protruding stump. I was soon covered with soft snow and wet to the skin; I was also exhausted and wobbly on my feet.

Finally, when I had fallen for the nth time and painfully rose again to my feet, I decided that I had had enough. At the next lake, where I could get good water for tea, I would camp.

It was somewhat lighter in front and the ground ahead sloped down. There was a lake, I guessed, but was not sure until I reached it. Throwing my pack-sack to the ground with a sigh of relief, I took out my tea pail and axe and walked out to cut a water-hole.

Then I stopped. The opposite shore, dimly outlined against the murky sky, seemed vaguely familiar. On a hunch I walked on, feeling the snow with my feet as I went. Some distance out I stepped on something smooth and hard. I felt along it with my hand. Then I struck a match. No doubt about it. It was a fresh dog trail. Magnus had passed that way. My cabin was less than half a mile upriver, beyond the next bend. I shouldered my pack-sack again and set off with renewed vigour. Rounding the bend I saw a pinpoint of dim yellowish light: a candle in the window.

When the dogs started barking Magnus came out: 'Where in hell have you been? I was getting worried and I've been out several times looking for you. Didn't you hear me shout?'

I shook my head: 'Wouldn't hear your twenty-two very far anyway.' Then I told him what had kept me and swung the load off my back. We went in and Magnus was happy over the wolf skins and I over the bannock and hot tea, which he had waiting for me. After supper, when I had smoked a cigarette, I grabbed the axe to go out to cut firewood.

'What are you gonna do?' Magnus asked.

'Get some wood.'

'You don't have to. I got plenty for the night.'

'Did you find some here?' I asked.

'No, I cut some myself. It was a bit heavy to pack and I had to

get down on my knees to cut it, but I got enough to do us.' He looked proud as he said it.

I eyed him with real admiration. With his back hurting as it did it must have been extremely painful to carry the big logs and then cut them into firewood. I had seen him try it at our home-camp and caught the agonized expression on his face when he did not know I was watching him. But Magnus had guts and was cheerful about it too, although every blow with the axe must have felt like having a tooth extracted. Many times afterward I saw him get down on his knees to do it, his features set as hard as the wood he was chopping. But he would not stop, for all my persuasion. He wanted to do his part.

The rest of the trip went without a hitch. We made a wide circle through familiar country, shot enough caribou for dog feed for several future trips and returned home with our sleigh empty of traps. We even picked up some minks and foxes and a marten out of our sets on our return trip. There were only a few traps left at home. We could set those on short lines around there.

Cap was happy and noisy. He still had some moose meat to chew on and his wound had healed very well. In another week he would be ready to take his place in the team.

After resting a day I took our remaining traps and set out on foot for a trip down river. The rapids over which we had flown on our way in would be fine places for mink. And since it was rugged country with many narrow canyons the team would be a hindrance rather than an asset.

There were many tracks of mink near the rapids and falls and I had soon set most of my traps in likely-looking places, where the tracks led in and out of the water or along the shore under some cliff. In one open spot with fast water I found an otter slide. Trying to decide on the best way to set a big trap for him, I stood and surveyed the surroundings, when an incongruous sound came to my ears. The quacking of a duck!

I looked up. Sure enough. Out in the centre of the open water swam a mallard. As I walked closer it made an awkward lopsided attempt to fly and settled again, swimming furiously around in the fast-flowing stream. It had a broken wing. On the ice

nearest the opening there were numerous tracks and areas of bare ice. The fowl, unable to fly away with its mates the previous fall, had settled here where there still was food and open water in which to seek refuge if danger threatened. In spite of its infirmity the poor bird tenaciously fought for survival. The many fox tracks, some of them venturing far out on the ice nearby, testified that dangers lurked. As I passed on my way down stream the duck made another quacking attempt to lift, its bright colours flashing.

During my subsequent trips I saw the duck still clinging to its decreasing area of open water, courageously fighting for its life. I came to look forward to the trips past its refuge, each time wondering if it still survived.

It was shortly before Christmas when I came there once again. Already far away I discovered that the open spot was no more. It had frozen over. I walked out to where it had been. There, near a circular area of newly formed clear ice, lay a few feathers and spots of blood. Spaced evenly, like beads on a string, were two sets of fox tracks, one leading there, the other away, the mute, grim evidence of a little wilderness tragedy. It was the end of a brave struggle for survival. Whether the spot had frozen over before or after the fox had had his meal was immaterial. The inevitable end had come. As I left, a feather blew across the snow before me and landed in a willow by the shore.

The winter wore on. Our trapping was profitable on the whole, although much of the country was new to us and it took time to learn what parts were good and where our traps were never visited by fur-bearers. And so we were forced to pull many and set them again in more favourable locations.

It was on one of these trips, when we extended our line farther north than we had been before, that we came suddenly upon a great number of fox tracks. There was something strange about the first I saw. I stopped to examine it closer. I had not made out what the strangeness was when Magnus drove up. He took one look at it and exclaimed: 'White foxes! Maybe we are getting a run.'

'Can't be. We are hundreds of miles from the Barrens!'

'Sure. We had one near Fort Norman one year. I caught about thirty that time and some fellows got more. And I've heard the Indians tell that they used to come down to Lake Athabaska pretty regular in the old days. Let's see if there are more tracks and start setting traps!'

'Boy!' Elated, I started ahead again. As I walked I remembered that I also had heard that white foxes had appeared often in the Stony Rapids country at the beginning of the century and probably before. Although typical tundra dwellers, the white foxes had then ventured far into the bushland in great numbers. Maybe Magnus was right; maybe one of those runs had hit our hunting grounds.

Soon we were sure of it. Fox tracks became more numerous as we went on and then we started setting traps. Magnus said there would be more following the first ones. If we were lucky we would catch enough for a real 'stake'.

Building big mounds of snow and placing a trap in the middle of each, covered by a thin crust of snow, we continued. By night we had all our available traps out and the tracks were decreasing in number. I was happy that night but Magnus cursed.

'It's just my usual luck again. If that plane had been able to take us where we wanted to go we'd have had all our traps set just about here, and we'd have had lots of white foxes by now. There must've been hundreds in that bunch that went by!'

I tried to console him by pointing out that if there were more coming we would get our part of them. Besides, the run had been heading southwest into country where we did have traps set.

But Magnus was still morose. He sat and stared into the fire, smoking his pipe. Occasionally he turned the slab of caribou ribs that was roasting, and moved it closer or farther away to give it just the right amount of heat, or added snow to the tea pail until it was full.

It was a clear, bitter night. The smoke rose up among the spruce tops and drifted slowly southward, the ice growled occasionally out on the lake. The northern lights leaped back and forth, blotting out the stars; a tree was rent with a sharp crack like

a rifle shot. And the dogs had curled up into tight balls on their spruce boughs to give the cold as small a target as possible. It was one of the coldest nights so far. 'And we had to pick this one to camp outside,' complained Magnus, as he turned his chilly back-side to the fire.

But his predictions did not quite come true. We did catch several white foxes in the traps we had farther south and a few in those we had set in the tracks of the run. During that trip and the next we got about a score in all. After that no more. And we saw no more tracks all winter. Our white-fox run had come and gone we did not know where.

It was now mid-December, and time to start thinking of a trip into Goldfields. We debated long about the best way to go. I suggested that we follow the river down to a spot where an old trail crossed it and led down to Goldfields over a number of lakes with short portages between. Magnus agreed about the latter part of the route, but was reluctant to follow the river. He insisted that we drive westward over the sandplains north of the range of hills bordering the river and then follow the trail to Goldfields. That route might seem longer but would prove faster eventually. He was so insistent that I agreed.

About the 20th December we started. We expected to be in Goldfields on Christmas Eve.

The second day out from camp we suddenly struck a fresh trail leading south, made by two teams. It was only a few hours old: some other trappers were heading for the fort for Christmas. Right then and there we decided to travel late that night until we caught up with them or came to the place where they were camped for the night. The moon was almost full, and we would have no trouble travelling after dark.

About nine o'clock that night the dogs suddenly picked up speed. I jumped on the sleigh as they tried to pass me, and at full gallop we tore down the trail. Then I discovered a red glow among the trees. Almost simultaneously I smelled smoke and heard the frenzied barking of several dogs.

As we braked the team to a stop, a couple of men rose from the side of the fire and walked toward us. I shouted greetings. They

were old friends, in fact old neighbours: August and George, who one winter had lived across the lake from me when I trapped on Ena. As we pounded each other's backs and called each other names, we decided that this was a good meeting and would lead to a good Christmas.

CHAPTER XIII

THE four of us travelled to the fort together, and during the trip we made plans for our stay there. Now we would eat and drink and loaf for a whole week.

Goldfields had changed once again. During the fall and early winter a lot of new people had moved in from the south. We almost gaped when we saw some senseless, shivering individual, wearing a felt hat and oxfords, stalk down the main street in the bitter cold. Among the newcomers were many who had never seen dog-teams, trappers or other wild beasts, but instead had read fanciful descriptions of the northland and its denizens.

To our amazement we found that some of the inhabitants viewed us with respect mixed with curiosity and alarm, and that they discreetly gave us a wide berth when, dressed in our caribou-parkas and moccasins, we walked in the street. Some of the more timid even started if one of us made a violent gesture or talked sharply. They probably regarded us as half-wild natives, who at any time might grab them by the throat or in good Wild West style start plugging innocent bystanders with a six-shooter.

All this amused us very much and especially August and George, who were always full of mischief and ready for pranks. They used this unique opportunity to the full. Their speech became suddenly louder than usual and peppered with meaty curses, attended by dark glances and threatening gestures. Sitting in the town's only beer parlour with knitted brows they told hair-raising stories about their alleged feats. Their admiring listeners, flattered by such company, bought them lots of drinks.

The visitors who came to look at our furs were also numerous and we sold some pelts at much better prices than our ordinary buyers, the merchants, were willing to pay. On the whole fur

prices had risen, and that of course gladdened our hearts very much.

One day August and George came over and told me that the insurance agent, who had recently arrived in town, had asked them if they had a silver fox. His wife wanted to buy a nice one, and from a real, genuine trapper. She wished that somebody, who filled the bill, would call at her house at eight o'clock that night with the required pelt. The boys added innocently that they had recommended me, because they knew that we had a very nice silver fox.

But I, who knew them, suspected that something lurked behind their friendly smiles. Gradually I managed to extract some of the truth. August admitted that they had told horrible stories about the gigantic and savage trapper who was in town, and who had some choice furs. It was evident that they had said much more; just what, of course, I could not find out. I was doubtful about the whole visit, but since Magnus and I had a nice silver fox, I finally departed at the appointed hour with the fox in a gunny-sack under my arm.

When I knocked, the door was opened by an elderly lady, who pleasantly asked me to enter. After peeling off my parka and depositing it on a chair together with the fox, I discovered that the living room was full of people. Some looked expectantly at me when I walked in. It then struck me what I was here for, and inwardly I cursed the guile of August and George. It was obvious that the business of buying a fox was a secondary matter. I had been invited here to act as exhibit A to the cream of Goldfields' society. There was the local druggist and the doctor, the bank manager and the post master with their wives, plus some clerks from the bank, a couple of typists and others who wanted to view a real trapper in captivity. As I was being introduced all around and my moccasins and the rest of my person was being curiously stared at, I debated with myself what to do. Should I act like a woolly, wild man, unaccustomed to furnished houses, or like an ordinary person? Here was a glorious opportunity, to begin with, to stand bashfully in the middle of the floor, finger my cap, stammer and blush when I was spoken to, upset glasses and

stumble over the carpets, and then later become familiar, holler and slap my knees, spit on the floor and use coarse language.

But that was probably just what was expected of me. They wanted to amuse themselves at my expense. I'd show them, I thought, as the host poured a drink and courteously asked me to find a seat. We sat down and chatted. When the other guests had calmed themselves, as I had neither emptied my glass at one gulp nor crushed it and ate the pieces or put my feet on the table, the druggist's wife asked a timid question. She apparently expected some hair-raising stories.

This was my chance. I decided to give the gathering full value for the outrageous price I intended to ask for the fox. All night I told my listeners the most gruesome stories about my feats. I don't think I have ever lied so much in my life: yarns about murders and mysterious disappearances, drownings and other accidents, wolf stories, bear stories. And here I must apologize for vilifying the poor, friendly black bear so ruthlessly. I invented tales of man-killing moose and Cree medicine, and between whiles made good use of food and drink.

When the gathering finally broke up, some of the ladies seemed shaken. I do not think that some of them ventured out in the dark without company for a long time afterwards. And I am sure that the wide-eyed hostess locked her door with care that night. But they had heard what they wanted to hear. And I had sold my fox.

The evening had a sequel and I deserved my punishment. The next night, August and George came over in very high spirits. 'Oh, there he is, that very charming fellow,' August simpered in a high, affected descent, and George laughed uproariously. They had met the insurance agent's wife, and cautiously inquired if I had called on her. The reply had been: 'Oh yes, he visited us, and we found him very charming.'

For a long time afterwards I could not appear among my friends without some grinning ape referring to 'that very charming man'.

Magnus and I sold the rest of our fur for a much better price than we had expected. The market was rising. This called for a couple of additional days of women and wine. But soon I was

ready to hit the trail again. The morning we left, together with August and George, only Magnus was downcast and unwilling to depart. He came, nevertheless, though even the drinks we took along to fortify ourselves did not seem to cheer him up. But we paid little attention to that as we sat on our well-filled sleighs, the dogs loping along on the beaten trail, happy to stretch their legs after a week's idleness.

I had bought a team and some additional traps. Now I could extend my trap line and Magnus and I could work independently. This would more than pay for the team, if trapping proved even nearly as good as it had been before Christmas.

When we reached the Tazin River, I again suggested to Magnus that we follow it up to our cabin. He was reluctant, but when I pointed out that we would save a day, and that I would go ahead, he consented.

And so we said goodbye to August and George and struck out northeastward. We soon entered the series of falls and rapids that we had flown over in the fall. Since this would be an extension to my line down river from camp and I saw many mink tracks I began setting traps.

Progress was slow and at times hazardous. Most of the way we broke our trail in the bush near the shore, but at times we had to cross the fast-flowing river or travel on the ice in a canyon at the foot of some cliff. There was no other way to get through unless we wanted to make a wide detour around the hills, which would mean missing many good places to set traps.

We reached a sharp bend, where the water frothed down over a succession of shelves. Rocks the size of houses littered the stream-bed and among them lay a jumbled barrier of great blocks of green ice brought down by the current. Jets of water spouted out under and among them. It was plain that all these together had recently formed a great dam behind which water had been pent up, raising the level of the stream several feet. We could even see the ice that had formed at this new level hanging in an arc with several feet of empty space under it from wall to wall in the canyon.

We stopped. Things did not look good. If the shell-ice broke when we were on it, neither man nor dog would have even a

fighting chance to save himself in that fast deep water. He would be sucked in and wedged among the boulders and rocks within seconds.

'Well, aren't you going ahead, Erik? What are you waiting for? I told you this way was no good, but you didn't believe me,' Magnus said. There was a jeering tone to his voice that I had not heard before, and I looked at him surprised. He seemed to enjoy taunting me.

I set my teeth and looked again. Perhaps there was a way. The northern shore just at the bend formed a knoll. North of that was a narrow gully. If I could get through that I would end up on the river well above the falls. Without further thought I turned the team, and headed for the mouth of the gully.

It was full of rocks and boulders, but by pulling and shifting the sleigh and cursing vehemently I managed to navigate through the gully and on to better ground above. The gully ended above the rapids even farther than I had hoped. The ice stretched out smooth and snow-covered before me. I walked out, and tested it with my axe. It had a good solid sound, not hollow as if an air space lay below. Leaving the team, I walked on, testing. The ice seemed all right. When I had reached the far shore safely I turned back for the team. By then Magnus had come up too.

Without a word I drove ahead. I heard Chuck pant right behind me. We had almost reached the far shore when I felt a sudden shudder underfoot. Then, with a loud, hollow crash and boom the ice gave.

The sheet I was on dropped as if hinged at the shore. Clinging to the sleigh handles I yelled at the dogs, who scrambled wildly to get up the steepening incline. A series of rumbling booms and sharp cracks reverberated behind me like thunder. Water came up on the sheet I was on and washed my feet. Blackie, my lead-dog, was on a chunk that was still attached to the shore, his nearest mate pawed at its edge. The other two dogs had flattened out and lay spread-eagled, shaking and panting, their ears flattened back. Cold sweat ran down my back.

Then I saw that my ice-sheet had stopped moving and glanced quickly behind me for Magnus. Chuck, who had been right at my

heels a moment before, was now in the water in a swiftly widening crack, clawing furiously at the edge of my sheet. The rest of the team perched on another sheet that was awash and swinging and see-sawing under their weight. The sleigh, its nose up, was half in the water and Magnus floated behind, holding on. Big, black cracks were appearing all over the ice beyond, and the whole was rapidly floating down with the current.

Chuck was still within reach. Leaning over and reaching out with one hand while holding on to my sleigh with the other I got a hold on his collar and pulled. Slowly the dog and the floe moved toward me. I wondered anxiously if Blackie would be able to take the additional strain. It seemed all right. My ice floe still did not move, nor did the slope steepen; some boulders must have supported it. I breathed more easily.

Chuck crawled up beside me. I tied the head-rope of my sleigh to his collar. Then, taking hand-over-hand holds on the taut harnesses of my team, and digging my toes into the slippery snow, I climbed up toward Blackie. He had stopped struggling and stood leaning forward with his claws hooked to rocks and roots. I got to the top and let out my breath. Then, yelling encouragement to the dogs I grabbed the harness again and helped them pull. They scrambled madly upward, their outspread claws taking furrows in the ice. Spot came over the rim, then Jim and finally Rover. The sleigh followed behind. Chum and Cap were on the incline. Magnus was on his knees on the floe, righting the sleigh.

Then in a mad rush they all came over the rim. I sat down on the sleigh, Magnus flopped beside me a moment later.

The sheet he had been on floated swiftly away with the current. The wide expanse, right down to the draw through which we had come, was an open blackness. Only bits and pieces of jagged ice sticking out like the teeth of a saw-blade remained three feet above the water on the canyon wall.

I lit a cigarette. Blowing out the smoke I said: 'That was a near thing!'

Magnus grunted an affirmative. 'Thanks for the help. I'm sorry for what I said down there. But then I didn't think you'd try it. I was scared.'

'That's all right. I was foolish to do it. Should've known better.'

'You'd have made it too. It was only because I . . .' Magnus stopped and went over to his sleigh and started pulling out a sack of clothing.

Fifty feet away there were several dry trees and some green spruce. I walked over and began to cut wood and prepare a camp. When the fire was burning well Magnus pulled off his wet clothing and put on dry things.

When Magnus had checked the water damage to his load and found that it was small (only the outside layer was damp) he sat down beside me and stared moodily into the fire. He was obviously depressed, something weighed on his mind. The prolonged silence became uncomfortable. I said lightly:

'Well, you can't blame your luck now, Magnus. We were about as lucky as men can be to get out of that alive.' I pointed my thumb toward the river.

Magnus looked me full in the face. Then he retorted: 'You mean you were lucky. If I'd been alone I'd never have got out. And if you had been alone the ice would never have broken. That happened only because I was along.'

'You're crazy! That's a lot of bunk!'

Magnus looked back into the fire. 'No, it's not—I've always had bad luck like that. That's the way it is with me. If I try something I get it in the neck, while others get away with it. And I bring others bad luck too. You know it didn't just happen that your cabin burned down. That was because I was there!—No, let me tell you!' Magnus was vehement and his words came faster. 'I've lost several cabins in fires. One summer I lost two out-cabins and a lot of stuff in a bush fire when I wasn't within a hundred miles of it. Three years ago my place in Cannery went up in smoke. And now your cabin. That was the fourth one. I bet you never had a fire before?' After I had answered with a shake of the head, he continued in a rush: 'There, you see! It was my fault. Every time we come home I am afraid to look for the shack in case it might've burned while we were away. And look, Erik, you packed bigger logs than I and you didn't hurt your back. I did.'

Then we had poor weather coming in and landed in a spot where there was no fish and no caribou. Lucky for you I wasn't along when you killed that moose and that bear. We wouldn't have gotten a thing,' he finished bitterly.

'Oh, rot! That just happened. It happens to everybody. That's just luck,' I protested thoughtlessly.

'That's just what I said. Luck!'

'Sorry. I didn't mean it that way. I've had just as much tough luck as anybody. Look at all the claims I got nothing for, all the poor trapping I've run into!' Then I added as a clincher: 'We've done well this winter so far. We got more fur and better prices than we expected.'

'A lot of good it's done me. I lost most of my dough in a game the last night in town.'

'No! How much? Where'd you go?'

'Jerry's place. He got it all but twenty-thirty bucks.'

I remembered. Jerry was a one-time trapper, who had found gambling in the forts and mining towns more profitable than the hardship of the trap-line. The summer before he had appeared in Goldfields, and pointing to his past honourable profession urged all the boys who wanted to play to come to his establishment.

'We'll treat you right', was his standard inducement. It was obvious that Magnus had received the 'right treatment'. Jerry's reputation for strict honesty in a stiff game was not all it should have been.

I swallowed all the retorts I could have made—about the occasional player having no business among the card-sharpers in a gambling joint, especially when he had had one drink too many. And that it was not bad luck but plain foolishness. Instead I shook my head.

Magnus continued: 'And I'll tell you something I bring bad luck to others too. I haven't told this to anybody around here. It happened when I was down around Fort Good Hope, eight years ago. And that's why I left that part of the country.'

He paused. After staring into the leaping flames for a few moments he spoke again, now slowly and haltingly: 'That winter Sven Gustafson and I trapped partners. We had done that for many

years. We came to this country together. We worked up along the Ramparts River. It was good country for marten. But it was pretty rough and in many places we couldn't use our dogs. In some of those river valleys there were canyons like this one and lots of rapids. One day after Christmas . . .

As Magnus continued his voice became lower and more monotonous and his speech at times almost incoherent, but the tale that he told was as stark and bleak as any I have heard in the North. With a scene like the one in which we were at that moment and with the roar of the rapids constantly in my ears as a background, I felt cold shivers down my spine as the story unfolded.

'That day we were walking on snow-shoes up the north branch. There were many rapids and a couple of canyons with high mountains on both sides—it would have taken us a day to cross some of them—so we had to use the river. And that river was bad. All winter it froze and was dammed up below the rapids for a while, and then it broke loose again. So in lots of places we had to walk across shell-ice like we did today and in some places on ice shelves that just hung on the canyon walls, sometimes eight or ten feet above the water, with the current wide open below and some of those shelves only a couple of feet wide. So we walked together, figuring it was safer that way.

'Sven was ahead and we were just past a real bad spot where the ice was just a couple of feet wide and where we had to hug the wall and feel our way ahead with our feet so we wouldn't step on glassy ice and slide. I had my snow-shoes off and wasn't going to put them on again before I was back on shore. But Sven put his on when we got past the narrow place. Then he started ahead. He'd only gone a few steps when the snow under him started to slide. You see, the ice was wider there, but it slanted out—from the weight, I guess—and it was slick as glass, and the new snow on top slid on it.

'He hollered once and I ran ahead and got a hold on his parka. Too late though. He went over the edge and I fell down on the ice. I was still hanging on to him though I too was sliding. Then I got my foot in a crack and stopped. But then Sven was hanging right over the current. My head and arms were over too.

'Well, Sven got hold of my other arm and I shifted my grip so I got one on his other hand 'til we was holding hands, sort of.

'I got my other foot in the crack too and Sven started swinging, with me helping, to get his feet back over the edge. A couple of times he almost made it, only his snow-shoes spoiled it. His foot shd off again.

'I was getting awful tired by then and Sven too, I guess. My arms ached like boils, and my feet wanted to come out of that crack. I told Sven to try to get those snow-shoes off, or he wouldn't make it up. Then he asked me to grab hold of his left arm with both hands and he'd try to get the snow-shoes off. We did that and he managed to wiggle one off—he figured that was enough. If he just got one foot over the edge he'd be all right. We locked hands again and tried another swing.

'Then something went wrong. He was almost up, and his foot touched the ledge, when he just slid right out of my hands, hit the water and was gone in a second. He never came up. Don't know what happened—we was both just too tired, I guess.'

Magnus paused. For a while he just looked into the fire. Then he continued.

'I looked all around in the falls and the river below, but I never found anything or saw a sign of him. I guess the current just grabbed him and sucked him down into the ice-jam down below. We never found a sign of him in the spring either. The floods took him right out into the sea, I guess.'

'It was all my fault too. If I'd only held on hard a little longer so he'd have got his foot up, he'd have been all right. Since then I've had nothing but bad luck. You see, Sven and I was from the same village. I'd known him since we went to school. I . . .'

'Hell, man! You can't blame yourself for that, Magnus. Nobody . . .'

'It was my fault. My usual bad luck, I tell you,' Magnus almost yelled, and gazed at me with blazing eyes.

I said nothing more. Instead I looked at the black water that rushed past our camp, and listened to the roar of the falls below. The sound seemed much louder and more ominous now in the increasing twilight. I suddenly understood Magnus much better.

Many things that hitherto had appeared incongruous fell in place and formed a picture. There had been eight winters of lonely nights in the trapping cabins in which to relive those moments of terror; time—too much time—to remember them, ponder over them, dissect them, try to think what he should have done to avert them, and try to decide what and whom to blame. Poor Magnus!

We started making supper. We talked about inconsequential things and went to bed. Early in the morning we were on the trail again, came to the end of my trap-line a little later and were home in our cabin again about noon.

CHAPTER XIV

THE bitter cold that usually gripped the northland about the beginning of January held off. For weeks after the New Year the weather remained fair, the temperature hovering around zero. The fur-bearers and their prey continued to roam as freely as before Christmas. Thus the trapping continued to be good, we were catching as many pelts now as before the holidays. I was as happy as a lark, and Magnus too was in better spirits. He talked more, and at times even whistled and sang. The good trapping offset the loss at the poker table, and the unburdening of his mind had probably helped. He suffered no ill effects from his ducking, and although his back still hurt, he did his best to share even the heavy chores. Sometimes he went down on his knees in the snow to chop firewood, and became abusive when I tried to make him stop.

Though I had urged him to do so, he had not gone to the doctor while we were in Goldfields. 'Just leave me alone, Erik; it'll get better after a while. Don't worry.'

One evening, when we had just returned from our first trip over the lines and were enjoying the warmth of our cabin, the dogs suddenly broke out in a frenzy of barking. We rushed out and heard the tinkle of sleigh bells. On our trail on the lake came a toboggan, pulled by four dogs. It had two occupants, one sitting in the canol, the other standing on behind. Our first visitors. Who could they be?

'Some Indian and his wife,' said Magnus.

'Must be,' I agreed. 'Just one team to two persons.'

When the sleigh started up the slope, the man behind jumped off, cracked his whip and ran alongside the team yelling encouragement. The four little dogs, pulling hard until their bellies almost touched the ground, dragged their load up the steep incline.

As soon as they had reached the yard, they flopped exhausted and panting and gulped snow, their tongues lolling out a foot. The figure in the sleigh stepped out, threw back its parka-hood and said: 'Howdy, howdy, boys!'

Magnus and I were both wrong, the travellers were not Indians. The man in the sleigh was Floyd Pratt, the other Jimmy—I have forgotten his second name—both from Goldfields and well known to us.

When we had returned the greeting and shaken hands with the travellers, Magnus went in to put the tea pail on the stove, while I helped Jimmy unhitch and tether the team. We gave them a good feed of meat from our cache. Then I helped him to carry in their bed-rolls and food-bags.

Floyd, a man of small stature but imposing manner, stepped in first. 'Nice place you have here, boys,' he said approvingly as he looked around and sat down. 'How's trapping been in these parts? Jimmy and I are going north for a few skins ourselves. Oh, we won't stop around here, we just followed your trail partways, it's easier that way. We're going 'way out in the Territories, another two hundred miles leastways. Much better trapping out there. Of course, you fellows can't go there, I guess, but I have a licence and Jimmy's my helper. I took him along to learn him something about trapping. It's no good for a young fellow to be hanging around town doing nothing. A man like me, who's been in the North for years, can learn a young fellow a lot that'll come in handy later on. Jimmy thinks so too, and asked me to take him along. And he gets his share of the fur too—not half, mind you. Learning how is worth something too, isn't it? Besides, I'm learning him about prospecting as well.—Sorry, Magnus, I forgot, you got a Territory licence too, haven't you? How much farther north are you boys going? I don't want to start setting traps on your line, but I'd like to follow it as far as it goes and start setting when I'm well past it in ground that nobody's been on—in fact we're going 'way farther.'

Floyd must have noticed the look of scepticism in my face as I eyed the two little bags that held all their provisions. Because as soon as Magnus had asked him and Jimmy to sit in and help

themselves to some supper, he gave our well-stocked shelves a contemptuous glance and said critically.

'I didn't take much grub along. I believe in travelling light on the trail, and living off the country, like a real trapper should, if he's worth his salt. Don't you think so too, Jimmy? And I don't think any trapper needs more'n four dogs either. Four's enough to pull any sleigh around. Yes sir! Four good dogs, like mine out there, is enough for any man. And they shouldn't be fed too much either; the Indians, who should know about them things, never feed their dogs too much on the trail. "Big belly, dog no good," old Pete Bearpaw used to say. Travel light and you cover a lot of ground. That's my motto.'

Floyd paused for a while to do justice to food and drink. When he had eaten, he leaned back in my bunk, belched comfortably and addressed young Jimmy: 'Look, Kid, how well a trapper lives. A nice warm cabin, plenty of grub, lots of magazines to read and a radio to listen to when you feel like it, and your own boss besides. And when he's a prospector too, like me, he's all set. He stands to find a gold-mine anytime, if he knows his rocks. Ain't that the life though, Kid?' Floyd made an expansive gesture with his hand, encompassing the whole cabin. Jimmy grinned happily in return: 'You bet, Floyd'

'Yes, so it is. Say, Kid, you better help the boys with the dishes, we wanna do our share of the chores, like one properly should. And bring in a pail of water and an armful of wood too. Then we'll have our prospecting lesson, and see what you've learned today,' he added as Jimmy, obediently, rolled up his sleeves and started cleaning off the table. Floyd rolled another cigarette.

'You know, Magnus, it's hell these days for a man to make a living in the North. Too many guys who got no call here, trapping on other men's ground. Crowding into the Territories too. The police should look after that. They should see to it that guys like that don't sneak in and take the bread from us old-timers, don't you think so too, Magnus? I got special permission for young Jimmy to come with me, and I guess he appreciates that all right, but nobody should be allowed to take along a helper, except with special permission, like me, of course. It isn't right.

They should set aside a part of the country for us, who have been in it all our lives, and see that we get a chance to make a living. They owe it to us, don't you think, Magnus?'—Floyd gave me an accusing and searching glance. 'You don't go in that way, do you, Erik?'

After supper, when the dishes were washed, and Jimmy had brought in wood and water, Floyd called him over, and said: 'Well, Kid, let's see if you've learned your lesson!' He explained: 'You see, I give him a list of ten words every night, that he has to learn the next day. That way he learns prospecting, and gets to know the right words about rocks and geology. There ain't much to this mineral business. When you just know the right words, you soon learn the rest. Most of that stuff they have in books is just crap. I can't make head or tail of it, and I don't think anybody else can either. Some might think they can, or let on they do. But they're just trying to put on the dog. A man can't learn about rocks from books, you learn about rocks from rocks. That stands to reason, don't it? But he has to learn the right words though, so's he can talk about them. O.K., Kid, let's hear what you know.'

Young Jimmy handed Floyd a piece of paper with some words scribbled on it. I looked at it over Floyd's shoulder. It went like this:

Cvarts: Hard white rock, like shugar.

Pyritt: Metal looks like brass.

Caleoyeritt: Yellow copper.

Pegmatitic: Coarse rock dif. colours.

Gabro: Black fine rock.

Cvartsite: Light rock looks like cvarts. Feels sandy.

Brcak: Deep valley and cliff.

Dyke: Band of dark rock.

Mineralisation: Pyritt and calcopyritt and som metals who make rusty rock.

Oxidation: Rusty rocks, som call it burn.

Jimmy had learned the words and explanations by heart, and repeated them painstakingly. Floyd beamed and said approvingly:

'That's the stuff, Kid. You'll soon be a prospector now.' Then he turned to me and handed me the paper. 'Take this, Erik, I don't need it any longer, and you might learn something from it yourself.—Yes, I know you've been prospecting some before, but it don't hurt to learn more, you know. Take it,' he urged magnanimously.

I did, and treasured it for a long time afterwards.

Meanwhile Floyd laboriously composed a new list for the next day. When he had completed it he said. 'You see, Jimmy studies that any spare time he has, and tomorrow night he knows that one too.'

We prepared for bed. Just before we turned in Floyd turned once more to Jimmy: 'Say, Kid, go out and see if them dogs got enough to eat, and give them some more if they haven't. They'll have a hard day ahead and need all they can eat now.'

The next morning we found that it had snowed during the night, and that our trails had been covered by six inches of new snow. Floyd looked around and said: 'It don't matter at all. With four good dogs, we'll do just fine. But it might be hard to get caribou though. Can you give me a feed of meat, Magnus—just in case we don't see any today?'

When they had loaded the sleigh he said to Jimmy: 'Well, now you have a good chance to learn how to snow-shoe before the team, Kid. Try to stay on the trail—you can feel it with your feet as you walk—I got to stay behind and steer and keep the sleigh on the road.'

He waved. "'Bye, boys, and thanks. See you in three weeks or a month when we come back. We should have lots of fur by then.' Young Jimmy, on snow-shoes, was already out on the lake when the team started. We watched the dogs pull hard in the soft snow and Jimmy walk industriously ahead, while Floyd stood on the sleigh and yelled encouragement to both. When they were a hundred feet out on the lake, he stepped over the back-board, and settled comfortably in the cariol. Slowly they disappeared in the drifting snow toward the north end of our lake.

About a week later, when Magnus was alone in camp, Floyd and Jimmy returned. Magnus told me about it with a smile. Floyd was

very angry and Jimmy looked downcast and mulish. Floyd had said almost accusingly to Magnus that they had seen few signs of fur or caribou, and complained that Jimmy had fallen down on the job of breaking trail. After two days they had gotten only ten miles beyond the end of our trap line. When Floyd had upbraided Jimmy for his slowness, the youth had asked him why he could not take a turn at trail breaking, too. And so they had abandoned their two-hundred-mile trip and turned back. Floyd had complained bitterly about the ingratitude of today's youth.

While I skinned and stretched my catch from the last trip, I mused over Floyd and what I knew about him. It made me smile.

The first time I had ever set eyes on Floyd was many years previously, when he had come to my cabin at Clearwater River. That time also he had had a youngster with him to help with the arduous of the trail. They stayed overnight and Floyd obligingly, and without prompting, instructed my partner and me on trapping and woods lore. Afterwards I had run across him occasionally in other parts of the North. And I had heard a lot more about him and his activities.

Floyd had been raised in a small settlement near the rail-head, where his father had established himself as a tradesman. As a white child in a community made up chiefly of Indians and people of mixed blood, he had some distinction. Floyd learned early to take advantage of his position—after all, it was a white man's world—and all through school and for years after lorded it over his playmates. He became their leader, exchanging advice and friendship for services of various kinds. Incidentally he learned also to speak Cree like a native.

School ended and other white people moved in, but Floyd retained his position among the 'old people'. He kept his leadership and became a go-between and interpreter and something of a lawyer for them. He let his friends do his work for these services. They continued to look up to him. It was thus inevitable that he should also get the right to pick and choose among the girls, and that he eventually should marry the flower of the fort's womanhood, Rosa, a half-breed girl of great beauty. This, of course, was only after enjoying her love until he got her into trouble. By

marrying her and duly impressing her with the honour he bestowed on her, he made her very grateful. As he himself put it to her and to anybody else who cared to listen: 'One has to do the right thing by a girl and show that one is a white man.'

Rosa, who was also a woman of property, was very happy with Floyd and gave him all she could both in the way of worldly goods and children. For years he was the best-dressed man of leisure in the whole town. Then the money came to an end. Floyd had to find other means of support.

To his bitterness he found that his friends, who had also married meanwhile and acquired families and responsibilities of their own, were now unwilling to help him live in the style to which he had become accustomed. They refused point blank. Floyd had to go to work. In partnership with one of his Indian friends he tried his hand at trapping. He did not do so well himself, but his partner did, and Floyd got half of that. The next year he went out with another partner—the earlier partner this time declined the honour—and Floyd lived.

Rosa, who was a hot-blooded person, at first grieved deeply over her separation from Floyd. Then, to console herself, she resorted to alcohol and parties. She was still a handsome woman and soon acquired many men friends, who plied her with drinks and gifts, accepting other favours in return. She became very popular.

Floyd heard about this and when he returned from the trap line he was very angry. They had their first big quarrel. Rosa was contrite, and he forgave her magnanimously. After all, she was his wife. As he said: 'One can't blame a girl for being lonesome and having a little fun when her man's away for months, even if he is trying to make a living for her.' It is possible that one cause for his leniency was that, during his absence, she had managed to keep the family well fed and that the bill at the trading store was gratifyingly small. Loyally he refused to delve into this miracle too deeply, but accepted her explanation without question; she said she had made much money by embroidering moose-hide mitts and moccasins and had sold them to tourists and the trading store.

The next season when Floyd was away, Rosa did even better; she had even a little nest-egg when he returned and there was no store bill to pay. Floyd was very happy about this and now he bragged constantly to his friends about her skill at needlework. And that summer Rosa did very well, especially when many trappers from the North visited town. She was very popular and soon became widely known among the boys as Bay Rum Rosa, a girl who always could be counted on to help a fellow out in return for a bottle or some other gift. Floyd discreetly closed his eyes to her comings and goings and spent most of his time in the newly opened beer parlour. That winter, and for several thereafter, he hardly needed even to go trapping. Rosa supported him. In return he was very kind to her; he seldom chided her even for her drinking.

But all good things come to an end. As time went by Rosa's looks faded—alcohol had its effect—and her income declined steadily. Floyd was again faced with the spectre of work.

Then came a life-saver. The radium strike was made at Great Bear Lake and Floyd went there as the fifty-fifty partner of a well-heeled greenhorn, who was glad to go with an experienced bushman. They did quite well; staked some claims, and sold out for a nice profit.

Floyd lived well again, especially as the influx of mining men in a town where women were scarce made Rosa's stock-in-trade go up again. He made out well himself too; there were always newcomers who wanted to learn about trapping and prospecting.

The Great Bear Lake rush was followed by others. The one to Goldfields coincided with a little talk with the town constable. The police told Floyd that he had had his eye on him and Rosa for some time, and urged them to leave for greener fields or he would run them in. Indignant, Floyd, with Rosa and the children, moved to Goldfields, where he would not be so shabbily treated.

In Goldfields, a camp made up almost exclusively of men, Rosa did well again. Although her claims had deteriorated, her demand on her men-friends' purses had also become modest. Indeed, favours could now be had for almost anything a man would offer. She had a big family and every little helped. But by then she had

become embittered with her husband and refused him even pocket-money. The future looked bleak for Floyd.

It was during that period that, with young Jimmy as his helper, he came to our cabin on his long trapping trip. Although it means going ahead of events, I shall—in the interest of continuity—tell how Floyd fared subsequently.

The following summer he went to Yellowknife, while Rosa and the children remained in Goldfields. By devious means Floyd held body and soul together. He staked claims, helped and instructed newcomers and even occasionally worked. Rosa still supported the family.

Then the second Yellowknife rush started, and Lady Luck finally smiled on the sorely tried man. Floyd sold a group of claims for a considerable sum and began to develop another. He even hired a crew of men. But when the job ended he seemed to have no money to pay either the drill-contractor or the workers. Finally, the driller, by threatening court action, got some money, but the workmen, who had little money, patience or trust in lawyers, went without.

Floyd had discovered something big, something much better than a gold mine: a way of getting work done cheaply. He quickly became a very successful operator. Henceforward he hired men with small means and few friends, and either forgot to pay them or held them off with promises until they gave up. He prospered.

Then he made his strike. Now he blossomed forth as a real mining man. He became much talked about and even got his picture in papers and magazines as the manager of a promising gold mine. He was suddenly a man of means and distinction.

Meanwhile Bay Rum Rosa had joined him. Only a shadowy wreck of her former self, she was no asset to a prospective magnate. In fact she was a distinct liability, especially as her morals and drinking habits, in spite of her husband's efforts to rehabilitate her, did not improve. But fate again intervened. On a boat trip with her husband she fell overboard and drowned. Thus ended a romance and a long partnership.

But a strong man goes on, undaunted by the blows of fate.

Floyd found himself a new wife, untainted by loose morals or native blood. However, his new spouse did not want her predecessor's large brood in her beautiful new home in the city, where she and her husband had moved. Fortunately, most of them were grown up by then and were put to work. Some of them were allowed to return to their beloved North, where a couple of the girls were afterwards reported to be following in their mother's footsteps. The youngest were shipped off to boarding school. None of them now remains to mar the beauty of the nice new house or destroy the happiness of its mistress and master.

Floyd Pratt, the success he deserves to be, is going on to yet greater things. But in spite of his present position as a pillar of his community, he is mindful of his humble origin. He is still happy to foregather occasionally with the boys and gossip about his pioneering days. A true self-made man of the North.

CHAPTER XV

TOWARD the end of January came the cold. The spell of Arctic weather that had held off so long was the more violent when it arrived. In twenty-four hours the temperature dropped and dropped until an icy fist held all nature in its grip, squeezing every last bit of warmth from it. Trees seemed to squirm as they cracked open to their marrow, water crackled like phosphorus in the air and the ice on the lakes boomed continuously. Every breath of frigid air hurt the lungs. One's body became stiff and chilled in a few minutes. It was mid-winter.

Game disappeared as if by magic. Only the caribou, too large to find shelter in the snow or in burrows, were still abroad. When it was stormy they stayed in the thick bush, but on calm days they gathered in herds out on the lakes to ruminate and to receive what warmth they could from a bleak, watery sun. Out there they were also safe from wolves, those wolves, that is, who had not curled up beside some carcass to sleep and eat until it was gone.

This was a time of hardships on the trail and of poor trapping. Magnus and I made no trips over our lines, but had time instead for all those chores that had been neglected during the busy season. We patched and mended clothes, harness and snow-shoes, dried meat, tanned hides, read and listened to the radio. And we talked, making plans for spring and summer.

Then, one day in late February, we again had visitors. A sleigh pulled by six dogs, with one passenger riding and two running behind on snow-shoes, came screeching in the powdery snow over the lake. Every creak of the harness, every softly-spoken word, every thud of the dogs' paws, was clearly carried to our ears in the crystal air.

It was Jerry Bigtoe When the sleigh ground to a stop he stepped forward, happily grinning with his whole smoke-brown visage. We shook hands and exchanged greetings while his womenfolk remained discreetly in the background. His bulging wife, Sarah, filled the sleigh and almost blotted out the daughter. Sarah made a load all by herself. The girl had been running behind or breaking trail with her father.

When we had exchanged the latest news, Jerry declared with a big smile and a glint in his eye that trapping had been poor and caribou scarce north of Tazin Lake where he had hunted. And so he had decided to accept his friend Magnus' invitation to come visiting and to look for a better place to spend the rest of the winter.

Magnus suddenly looked uncomfortable and I had a suspicion. I looked at the girl, who smiled shyly in return. I was right. She was Agnes, the girl who Magnus had so ardently courted prior to our staking trip the summer before. I also remembered seeing Magnus in Jerry's company a couple of times during our Christmas in Goldfields. It was all very plain to me then.

A bit red in the face, Magnus hurried to help his guests carry their belongings and asked them to step in. Sarah came forward, shook hands and waddled on. Agnes followed with demurely downcast eyes. She was a strapping girl in her late 'teens, with dusky good looks. As yet there was no hint in her body of the obesity that childbirth and age had given her mother, and which in time would surely overtake her as well. Magnus' face was a study when he watched her move.

When the arrivals took off their parkas it became obvious that this was not merely a chance call. They were all dressed in their best: Jerry in blue serge pants and a spotlessly white shirt usually reserved for Christmas and 'treaty-time', the women in bright, new printed cotton dresses. And all wore new beaded moccasins. They had obviously camped a few miles away to change from their everyday wear before continuing to our cabin. Something interesting was about to happen.

After supper the purpose of the visit became increasingly clear. While Agnes sat on the bunk, with folded hands, casting shy

glances, Sarah, smiling archly, pulled out an embroidered buckskin jacket, fur-trimmed moccasins and mitts to match, and gave them to Magnus, volubly assuring him that Agnes had made them all by herself with her own little hands. She made Magnus put them on right then and there. They fitted nicely. Magnus looked really handsome and Agnes more demure than ever.

I was also included in the bounty. Sarah handed me a pair of beaded moccasins. When I thanked her and commented on the fine workmanship, she said deprecatingly that they were not as nice as those Magnus had received, but then she was not as good a seamstress as her daughter. I glanced at Magnus. He was taking it hook, line and sinker, looking happy and proud.

The next day, while Jerry and his family were putting up their tent and preparing their camp site a few hundred feet from our cabin, I tried to get a word with Magnus, but he was either too busy helping or avoided me purposely. Most of the time he was hovering near Agnes, helping her with whatever she was doing. It became plain that the visit had been prearranged without my knowledge and that Magnus had a guilty conscience—also that he was too far gone to be reasoned with. I could only watch.

Magnus' courtship progressed swiftly after that. The next few days he spent almost exclusively in Jerry's tent, coming home only to eat and sleep, and finally hardly for that. Instead he carried away food from the cabin and had most of his meals with his beloved. In the cabin he had a vacant look. He was completely moonstruck.

The weather continued bitterly cold. Just to pass the time I went on some hunting trips, although the dogs pulled unwillingly and hands and feet became frost-bitten.

Then one morning, after Magnus had been away even for the night, he came home with a proud and satisfied expression. After gathering up an armful of cans and packages he mumbled an invitation to me 'to come over for lunch about twelve' and departed again hurriedly. I sensed important developments.

At the tent a glance told me that my suspicions were justified. Seated cross-legged beside a cloth in the centre of the floor that was heaped with food were Agnes and Magnus, looking very

happy, and Jerry puffing proudly on his pipe. Sarah, busy by the stove, beamed beatifully.

When I had seated myself, Magnus, red and stammering, informed me that he and Agnes were going to be married. Registering pleasant surprise I congratulated the blissful pair and started doing justice to the meal. It was very good, Sarah had outdone herself as a cook.

After this I saw little of Magnus. Now he spent all his nights in the tent, and came to the cabin only for more food. Obviously the marriage was being thoroughly consummated even before the banns had been published. Agnes' manner also confirmed it. She had lost her shy and demure expression. She now looked at me with a woman's knowing, frankly appraising eys.

Thus their cups of happiness were full to overflowing. Agnes had got her man, Magnus the girl he wanted, Jerry a white man for a son-in-law, and Sarah a good provider for her daughter—and incidentally also for herself. I struck the only jarring note in the love song.

This was mainly because I was apprehensive. Our stores were dwindling at a furious rate. In the few weeks Agnes had been there Magnus had carried away half of the provisions that were to last us until spring. Our caribou meat too was disappearing from the stage as fast as I could haul it there. Also, though the cold had abated considerably during the last week, I could not get Magnus to come out on the trap line with me. At last, when I spoke to him in terms that almost led to a quarrel, he grumpily consented to go. I had still said nothing about the food.

It was almost noon on the day we were to start when Magnus showed up. When I tried to make him hurry his preparations so we could get away he was surly and replied that there was no rush. The moon was full, we could travel late if necessary, he said. It was late afternoon before we left.

Although it was almost a month since we had last been over our lines the harvest was scant. Many traps were out of working order under heavy, drift-packed snow, and most of the foxes, now in their rutting season, were badly 'rubbed' on the flanks, making their pelts practically worthless. It was high time to pull all fox

traps and reset them in new locations for marten, mink and lynx, who were still prime and with the coming warmer weather would soon be abroad again. All this work took much time. Thus it was midnight when we reached our tent. We had certainly taken advantage of the moonlight.

Once out on the trail things went better. The next morning Magnus was up bright and early, eager to go. From here on we each went our own way on separate lines. Magnus was gone long before me. When I left the tent he was already disappearing beyond a point miles away.

Fixing up all my sets anew and moving many traps to new locations took much time and work. Moreover, caribou were becoming scarce again, and hunting for dog feed consumed additional time. It was more than a week later before I was home again, tired but happy in the knowledge that my trap-line was in shape for the rest of the season.

Magnus had been at home for several days. When I discreetly asked him how he had fared and how many pelts he had caught and if he had had to reset many traps, he grumpily replied that trapping had been poor and that there were no minks on his line anyway, so he had not bothered to reset his fox traps. No use running around like a fool when there was no fur; might as well stay at home for all the good it did you.

Though I was furious, and inwardly cursed Indian girls, greedy in-laws and moonstruck fools all to hell, I said nothing. It was obviously useless. Magnus would not listen to any reason.

But something would have to be done. Although the inroads on our food supply had lessened a little, partly because it already was so low that Magnus was ashamed to carry off as much as formerly, and partly because Jerry, with the warmer weather, had gone hunting occasionally, it still would not last until spring. After taking stock I sat down to think. There was only one thing to do. I must break up the partnership, which was becoming too one-sided, split the remaining furs and supplies and move out. There was a cabin on my trap line where I could live the rest of the season. I decided to tell Magnus the next morning.

But the next morning he was gone. Taking Agnes with him he

had departed at day-break. Jerry, who was hitching up his team when I came to the tent, told me that Magnus had said something about resetting his traps. Magnus' conscience had obviously bothered him; trapping was, after all, his trade and he knew the importance of keeping his lines in shape. I was relieved; perhaps he was waking up and returning to normal.

The next day I too left for another trip over the line. This time the result was good again and I caught as many pelts as I could expect at that time of the year. The weather was milder and I returned home in high spirits.

Both Magnus and Jerry were out when I got there. Agnes, who was at the cabin when I arrived, told me that Magnus was on the line again and that her father had gone out to set some traps to the northwest, where he had seen many marten tracks on a previous hunting trip. This was heartening news; perhaps all would be well after all! By tighter rationing and by eating more caribou meat we might still make our supplies last through the season. Trapping was still good, and Magnus, who seemed to have come to his senses again, was a good partner. Happily I went to work to thaw out and skin my catch.

It was nearly nine that night when I had stretched my last coat, put the tea kettle on the stove and settled on my bunk with a book. There was a knock on the door. I answered and Agnes came in.

'I think maybe you make tea,' she said and smiled.

A little surprised, I replied that I was just making some, and asked her to sit down. While I set out an additional cup and spoon, she continued. 'Magnus, Father away, Mother she sleep, I lone, nobody talk.' She added: 'I guess maybe you lone too. I come, talk,' and settled down on Magnus' bunk and smiled again.

Laughing, I pointed at the book: 'When I lone I read.'

Agnes looked pensive. 'Book no good,' she said at last. 'Too much read, too much worry. All the time worry.'

After pouring the tea I sat down. 'Books are good company. You learn a lot from them.'

'Read too much no good. You just like teacher or priest maybe.' Her smile became broader as she looked at me over her teacup. 'You just like book, no like woman maybe?'

The drift of her conversation did not appeal to me. I stopped smiling. 'Magnus likes to read too. And he also likes women. He likes you anyway. You are his woman, aren't you?' I countered.

There was a short pause. Then she went on: 'Maybe you like Magnus. Like book, like woman too? Maybe like woman like me?'

This time there was no mistaking her meaning. She had come visiting for a purpose, one purpose only. She was straightforward about it too. Now that she had caught her man she was ready for a fling with anybody who came along, as soon as the opportunity arose. She was like other women of her tribe. I had seen too many of her ilk. Poor Magnus! By and by he would be saddled with a tee-pee full of children, fathered by diverse boy-friends, cousins and chance visitors. It was even quite possible that her mother was a party to this visit and had permitted her to come just to get a hold on me, or rather the good provisions that still remained. The methods of the primitive native were simple but effective. Not this time though. I was angry.

'Look, Agnes,' I said. 'I don't like woman like you. Drink your tea and go home! Hurry up. I want to go to bed!'

As she edged toward the door she did not look perturbed. There was almost contempt in her voice: 'You go sleep, Lone!'

'Yes. Lone. Good night,' I replied.

She delivered her parting shot: 'Guess you no man. You just like book like priest!'

The door closed. I heard the crunch of her moccasins in the snow die away. She had gone, but she would be back some other night. Her kind did not understand loyalty. A fine mess was developing.

The next day Magnus came. With only a wave he drove straight to the tee-pee, and leaving his team in harness crawled in.

Half an hour later I heard his footfalls approaching. Fast. As he entered the door he cursed and slammed it shut. Face furious, eyes wild, he rushed to the table where I was eating and stood over me.

'What have you done to Agnes, you —— ! She says you tried to make her sleep with you!' he blurted.

'That's a lie, and you know it,' I replied, meeting his eyes levelly. 'She's your woman. I wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole.'

'Goddamn right you did, you goddamn — ! I'll teach you to go sniffing around her! I'm goddamn well gonna kill you!' With a lightning motion he pulled his hunting knife and stood over me with the gleaming blade raised, his eyes boring into mine.

Wedged between the wall-fast table, the bunk and the wall, I could not move. I stared steadily right back. His wild gaze faltered a little. Then with a curse and a sweep he drove the knife into the table an inch from my hand. The handle quivered a moment and stood still. I looked at it and back at Magnus.

'Are you crazy?' I said at last.

There was a look of puzzlement and shame in his face. 'You're driving me crazy,' he replied as he whirled and walked to the door.

As he went out I stood up. 'You go and ask her again. Maybe she'll tell the truth this time,' I said as he closed the door.

Then I sat down again. The knife was still in the table. I pulled it out. It was hard to dislodge—it had been driven more than an inch into the pinewood. I laid it on a shelf.

Then I started taking down our provisions and supplies from the shelves and put them in two piles on the floor. The heaps were not big. Then I divided up plates, cutlery, pots and pans and went out to the cache for our furs. I was sorting out them also when Magnus came back. He looked downcast and ashamed as he watched me silently. When I looked up he said:

'I'm sorry, Erik. She said it was just a joke. She told me that just to make me jealous, she said.'

'That's fine, Magnus. Great joke! I've divided up everything here in two piles. Take your pick. I'm moving out. Your knife's up there.' I pointed with my thumb at the shelf over my shoulder.

'O.K., if you want it that way, Erik. I suppose you're right. What about the money I owe you? Want me to pay it in the spring?'

'I might not see you then. You better pay me now with furs—you know what minks are worth. I'll take the Crow Lake tent, that okay?'

Magnus nodded silently. After a while he handed me a bundle of mink pelts. 'That enough?'

I nodded and took it and put it in a bag. Magnus stood around for a little while. Then he said: 'Well, I guess that's all then, Erik. I'm sorry. We'll be seeing you!'

'You bet. Take care of yourself. 'Bye!'

An hour afterwards I had loaded my sleigh and left. That night I came to a cabin where I used to stop overnight on my trips over my line and where I intended to live the rest of the season.

I saw Magnus and Agnes only once afterwards, two years later. They were then blessed with two children and had a third one on the way. Agnes had increased in girth, and not just around the middle. Magnus was thinner and greyer.

One winter many years later Magnus died in his lone cabin. He was not found until after break-up, when the police had come to search for him. When found, the body was still half-frozen and well preserved. Judging from the signs, he had been ill for some time, because he had not even been able to cut wood. Two long poles protruded from the stove. He had been pushing them farther in as the ends burned. Agnes lived in Cannery. She had eight or ten children by then. She soon took up with another trapper.

The remainder of the trapping season I spent in the little cabin. Shortly before break-up, when minks and lynx became unprime, I started back for Goldfields, prospecting on the way in, and stayed until open water with Pete on Beaverlodge Lake. Together we paddled in to Goldfields.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN I stepped into the mine office and laid my sample bags on the desk, Bill, the manager, looked up from his work and smiled: 'Hello, Erik. Have you found another mine?'

'No,' I replied, 'probably not, but I don't seem to be able to leave the rocks alone. These are just samples I picked up on my way in from the bush.'

Bill's smile widened. 'Well, I must admit that you haven't been very lucky with your mines so far, Erik, even though you've been carting in rocks for a long time now. It does not seem to pay to prospect on your own, does it?'

'No,' I replied emphatically, 'and I don't intend to spend any more time and money on it either!'

Bill gave me an appraising glance. 'How would you like to go to work for us instead and get paid for your trouble? We need men; you know your way around in the bush and something about prospecting too. You can choose your own partner. You'd be working in Yellowknife. What do you say?'

Yellowknife! I accepted at once.

'Good. The planes are just beginning to fly in there again. You'll be leaving in a few days. Phone me tomorrow before noon for instructions, and inform me if you have a partner. If not we'll have a man up there for you.'

Yellowknife! I was exultant as I paddled across the bay. The field had been discovered some years before, and some small but very rich gold finds had been made there then. In spite of that it had not come into its own. The district lay far away, three hundred miles further north of Goldfields, at the mouth of Yellowknife River on the north shore of Great Slave Lake in the North-

west Territories. In the spring of 1935 many prospectors had left Goldfields to go there. Good new finds had then been reported. Then it had again become quiet up there, until the previous fall, when I had heard stubborn rumours about some fabulous new discoveries and of additional ore on known properties. If Bill's company now intended to send more men up there it meant that these rumours were true and that they expected great things this summer. And I would be in on the ground floor.

I tightened my grip on the paddle. New places, new adventures, new finds. Again I dreamed of quartz veins laced with gold and of nuggets as big as my thumb.

'Would you like to go to Yellowknife with me?' I asked Pete. 'Good pay, everything found and 25 per cent of all we find. Bill offered me a job, and I took it.'

Pete considered for a while but declined. 'No, thanks. I think I'll stick it here, and work my Ace Lake claims. There's stuff there—it just needs more work. What about your summer holidays? And your dogs? Are you coming back in the fall?'

'We'll see! I'll pay you for feeding the dogs, and if I don't come back you can have them. Now I'm going to find a mine or bust!'

The aircraft made a wide bank, dipped its nose and dived toward a little bay, surrounded by tents and new, yellow sheds. We landed, the motor raced again, and we sped toward the shore, slowed and glided smoothly toward the wharf. There eager hands tied up the plane beside several others and we disembarked.

Already my first cursory inspection of Yellowknife told me that something exciting was happening and that all the wild rumours I had heard about it must be true. Although the settlement, which lay on a point on the west shore of a bay and on an island outside, was smaller, there were more people and much more activity than in Goldfields. Already the number of planes by the shore topped anything I had seen there, although it was early in the season. And I met several friends, who had been in Beaverlodge in the first rush. 'Well, so you have left Goldfields at last. That's right, here it's different, here you'll see some real finds!' was the substance of their remarks.

In the mine office I was told that preparations for my departure to the field were not yet complete. That gave me a few days in which to acquaint myself with the town and the mines and prospects in its vicinity. I spent the days visiting the various showings, and the evenings getting to know the town and the people, and looking up old friends.

In Yellowknife life followed the old Wild West pattern. Not openly perhaps, for the Mounties kept the lid on, but under the placid surface it boiled and fermented. Here work went on around the clock. Houses and sheds rose like mushrooms after rain. Drovers of workers unloaded boats and barges, motorboats scurried back and forth between town and the mines, planes landed and left. The few and primitive restaurants made a land-office business, and one could buy almost anything in the stores, but the prices were sky high. I gulped for breath every time I paid for a meal. Even the old man who ferried people across the fifty-foot narrows that separated the island from the point at ten cents a head was busy from morning until night and making a fortune.

Bill Stone, who guided me around the first day, said that one could live well and get anything in Yellowknife, but that it cost at least fifty dollars a day to do it.

It was a Klondike in a sheep's clothing. True, there were no saloons or cabarets with dancing girls and piano players, no gambling houses, where pokes of gold dust were weighed on the tables or thrown in the pot or where men were shot at the drop of a hat. The police had squashed that sort of thing. But the hilly, winding streets teemed with prospectors, adventurers, mine magnates, Indians, trappers, miners, cheats and card sharpers. Even the weaker sex was already represented, although the skirts so far were few. Outwardly, law and order reigned, but behind locked doors seethed life of a different hue. A fat billfold was the sesame to all these resorts. If one wanted a drink one could get it for a dollar a glass or twenty-five dollars a bottle in any one of fifty-two bootleg joints. The gambler could get his fill of poker or blackjack at tables that ran night and day, where fortunes were won or lost and the drop of every card was followed in strained silence by a throng of stony-faced gamblers and their victims. There were

also houses, discreetly situated, where he who longed for feminine company could win the lady's favour for ten dollars for a while or for fifty for the night. For those who wanted to be more circumspect there were dance halls, and for those who wanted more innocent fun, a picture show.

But all this was overshadowed and outdistanced by the hunt for gold. One discussed, almost breathed, ate and drank gold. Everywhere, gold was the subject that unified rich and poor, sourdough and greenhorn.

During the preceding season many new finds had been made and many old ones had blossomed again. Men who all their lives had searched without success had finally seen their dream come true here; they made their FIND.

An impoverished dry farmer from the prairies had literally stumbled over a rich quartz vein. He would never again worry about his drought-ravished acres.

A half-breed waitress in one of the town's cafés had, with her savings, staked a complete greenhorn. After only two weeks' search he discovered a showing that made them both independent forever.

A pilot, who was forced to land on an unknown lake, saw gold protruding right out of the outcrop to which he tied his craft.

Two prospectors, Thompson and Lundmark, who for months had worked in the field without success, saw from the window of a plane a little island, which from the air looked white. They marked the spot on their map and returned to it shortly after. Part of the island and the bottom of the lake to the next point was underlain by goldbearing quartz. This was the beginning of the 'Treasure Island' mine, later named after its discoverers.

These and other equally fantastic stories were repeated everywhere and several of my friends, many of whom had themselves fared well, testified to their truth.

My visits to nearby properties were as important as finding out where the best prospecting ground lay. In every field the valuable minerals occur associated with some other commoner ones which are easier to find but indicate the presence of the rarer. On a known occurrence the prospector can make himself familiar with the

geology and the mode of occurrence of these minerals. These are usually roughly the same all through any one field. Thus they give him a good clue to follow in his search. Wherever he finds a geological set-up similar to that of established showings he is on ground that is worth prospecting.

There were several mines in production or under development in Yellowknife. Three of them, Negus, Con and Rycon, were quite near the town.

The story of Rycon is romantic and worth telling.

In the summer of 1935 a prospector by the name of Mosher came to Yellowknife and staked two claims adjoining one of the most promising properties there, named Con. He recorded his ground, but shortly after he left for the East without having done much work on it. The following summer a friend did his assessment work, but the year after nothing was done and Mosher himself did not return. While development work continued on nearby properties his was lying idle. Soon it was evident to all that nothing would be done and that Mosher's claims would become open for staking by default, and many of the prospectors secretly made preparations to restake them. Among these were Tom Payne and his partner.

Long before the hour when the ground was to fall open a number of would-be stakers gathered near the number-one posts of the two claims. All had their own stakes ready—inscribed except for the hour and minute of restaking—to be raised beside the lapsed ones. The first man to get his number-one post—the deciding one in case of dispute—in place would naturally also get the claim. The men waited, eyed each other surreptitiously and followed the arc of the minute hand on their watches as it neared the legal hour. Their tension grew; it was going to be a mad scramble to get the post in first, and even then it would be hard to prove who had precedence.

Suddenly somebody spoke up: 'Look, fellows, this is going to be a god-awful smozzle. We all want this ground and only one of us'll get it. And then he'll have one helluva time with court cases and other trouble to prove he was first. Only the lawyers'll make any money on the deal, and the court might even throw out the

whole thing in the end and we'll all be sucking the hind teat. So let's get together and form a syndicate with equal shares for all, and stake it all together.'

The tension eased, everybody present consented. The men all signed their names to a temporary agreement, and the man in whose name the ground was to be staked was chosen by lot. It was a few minutes after the hour when all this was done and the whole gang started along the claim line toward the number-two post.

They had only gone about a hundred feet when there was a shout from the leading man. There, in front of them, was a brand-new post, neatly hewed and set in a legal mound of rocks. It was marked as staked by Tom Payne one minute after the hour, just a few minutes earlier!

Tom Payne had proved himself a smarter and more original thinker than the other stakers. There was nothing in the law which stated that a claim would have to be restaked exactly along the boundaries of the former staking. When a piece of ground fell open one could stake all or only part of it. And so Tom, instead of going to the number-one post of the old claim, where he well knew other stakers would gather, had hidden beneath a big spruce to await the legal hour. When the time came he planted his post in a ready-made stone mound. Once this was done he had all the time he needed to plant the other three; it was the number-one that decided ownership. And so Tom had grabbed the ground adjoining the Con property for himself, leaving only a narrow wedge-shaped fraction to the newly formed syndicate.

The same thing had happened to the other claim, where Tom's partner had pulled off the same trick. The two jubilant foxes could laugh up their sleeves.

They also harvested the fruits of their smartness. They went into partnership with Mickey Ryan, a former boxing champion, who headed a transportation company. He advanced them money for exploration which resulted in the discovery of some very promising ore.

C.M.&S., who owned the Con mine, and who had found their property poorer than first indicated, had also found that

some of their best gold veins dipped into the Ryan claims. Consequently they were very anxious to buy it.

They started negotiations with Ryan, but to begin with found his price was much too high. When Ryan, after some days' talks, did not budge, Archibald, the director, who represented C.M.&S., prepared to leave. Then, on the last morning, an hour before plane time, he phoned Ryan: 'What's your last price?'

'Half a million and 40 per cent of the net,' was the prompt answer.

'O.K., you've sold it,' replied Archibald, and the biggest mining deal in the new camp had been made.

The contract was signed the next day. A little more than a year later Rycon came into production; its ore was among the richest in Canada. Tom and his partner were on easy street for life and Ryan was a power in the district.

Word came for me to go to the mine office. A map was spread out and an area was pointed out to me. 'They have made finds here and there. The formations are very similar to those of this place. Have you familiarized yourself with them, Erik? Good, here are some geological maps and reports. You'll get Paul Bunyan for your partner.' Mike, the geologist, smiled at my startled expression. 'He's not as awful as his name. Green when it comes to prospecting, but very keen on it. And he's a good bushman, so you don't have to be afraid of him getting lost. Here he comes, by the way.'

A boy, a few years over twenty, with ruddy complexion, flaxen hair and a pair of bright-blue eyes, stepped into the room. We were introduced. 'Hello, Bill, here's your partner, Big Erik. Don't try to wrestle with him.'

We shook hands and eyed each other. I liked the boy at once. He was of athletic build, with a wide-awake expression. Paul was of 100 per cent Scottish ancestry, but looked like a Scandinavian. Later I found that he had his nickname from an expression he loved: 'Don't that beat Paul Bunyan!'

The rest of the day we gathered up our outfit and supplies. Tent, canoe, tools, cooking utensils, food and other equipment were piled under a tarpaulin on the dock. Again we had that

pesky load limit to wrestle with. We wanted to take along as complete an outfit as possible, but could not exceed twelve hundred pounds. The canoe, which actually weighed one hundred, and which was to be carried strapped to the float, had to be counted as three hundred pounds air weight. After much discarding and substitution and head-scratching we finally had our outfit ready.

When the next morning we circled over our future prospecting area, the woods were burning all around us. On the hills the flames shot up against the sky, and out of the valleys welled thick yellow clouds of smoke, among which glinted reddish nests of fire. Locally the whole landscape was hidden by smoke.

We had to look for a new place to go instead of the lake we had originally chosen. It was impossible from the air to find a safe place to land, for smoke blotted out most of it. Finally, we found a lake where we could go down. Around this one the bush had already burned. The plane taxied to a green point which had escaped destruction, and while we unloaded we looked around. Paul said: 'Soon we can say: "Hiyah, Rastus!" Don't that beat Paul Bunyan, though!'

He was certainly right. The bush had burned only a few days previously. In many spots, where fire still smouldered in the moss or in some punky windfall, thin streamers of smoke ascended. But for prospecting the vicinity was excellent. The underbrush and moss had been burned off and the rocks lay bare, though sooty. A couple of heavy showers to wash them clean was all that was needed to make the area a prospector's paradise.

That other gold hunters also were interested in the area we had discovered from the plane. In spite of the bushfires there had been many white dots on the shores of other lakes: tents, that showed where they had camped.

That night we had our camp site in shape and were ready for work. In the evening we studied our maps and reports and made our plans for a systematic exploration of the surroundings. We had about two weeks to do it in. Then Mike would visit us, and if we had not found anything or did not consider the area worth more work, we would be moved to a new location.

some ten to twenty miles away. We could choose the location ourselves.

The first few days we worked together. Then we split up. Paul really was the good bushman that Mike had assured me he was, and I did not have to worry about him getting lost.

Usually we laid our traverses parallel about a mile or half a mile apart across the general trend of the formations, making notes on a sketch map of the rock types, their strike and dip, any 'breaks' or shears and their locations in relation to the lakes and creeks that we encountered. We met for lunch at some previously-agreed-on spot, usually a lake or creek, some four or five miles from our starting point. There we boiled tea and ate. After lunch we struck out a mile or so at right angles to our morning's traverse and returned in the afternoon along a course that lay parallel to it. By night we had a rough picture of the formations in an area of some fifteen to twenty square miles. This was of course a very superficial picture, but if we saw anything interesting we would return and prospect the ground more closely.

Besides noting the formations, we kept our eyes open for rusty spots, faults or shears, and especially for quartz veins. But the latter were sometimes very hard to discover, because the quartz was often so dark that its colour hardly differed at all from that of the surrounding rock. This was more difficult as everything was now covered by a layer of soot.

In the Yellowknife district the gold occurred in quartz veins cutting sedimentary and volcanic formations, the so-called hot and cold sediments. Sometimes the wall rock also carried small values for a short distance from the vein. The quartz varied in colour from pure white to greyish-black. Sulphides and sometimes tellurides usually accompanied the gold. The values were often spotty; one part of a vein could be very rich, another nearly barren.

When we encountered something interesting we would dig and knock around and follow the formation as far as we could and take samples.

Sampling is perhaps the most important thing in prospecting, especially when searching for gold. Only when the ore is very rich is the 'free gold' visible to the naked eye. The old-time

prospector used to burn and crush his samples and then wash out the gold in some stream. By the 'colours' in the pan he could estimate fairly accurately the gold content of the sample. Today panning is almost a lost art and, with fast and frequent plane service, impractical. The modern prospector sends his samples to an assay laboratory and gets accurate results quickly. The main thing is to take samples of any rock he suspects as being valuable. Nobody, no matter how experienced he may be, can tell by its appearance if a rock contains gold. There is only one rule which holds, the old adage: 'Gold is where you find it.' More than one expert has gone wrong by pronouncing some formation valueless.

It is a sorry fact that many companies who do not spare expenses in outfitting and sending a prospecting expedition into the field will try to economize on the comparatively small expense of analysing and assaying samples. It is also very common for some field supervisor to 'edit' a prospector's samples and discard those he considers valueless. Economy of this sort nullifies the whole purpose of the expedition and makes the immensely higher costs connected with exploration just plain waste.

Our company was fortunately of a different hue. Instead of trying to economize in this respect they urged us to send in samples of anything we even remotely suspected of carrying values. They had their own laboratory in Yellowknife, where samples were quickly assayed, so that we had the results a week or two later. This, of course, helped us very much in our work.

The area where we now worked was dismal. For miles on end we walked through a burned and blackened landscape, where the tree trunks, nude of leaves and needles, pointed accusingly at the sky. The bare rocks and boulder-heaps, with every last speck of moss and grass gone, were dirty, and soot-black. The swamps and muskegs abounded in deep hidden holes where the fire still smouldered and into which one could, without warning, flounder to one's waist in ashes and dirt. Punky logs still harboured glowing embers, ready to burst into new flame with the first strong wind. Along creeks and on points and islands green bush still remained, but even there the leaves and needles were often browned.

Soon we were as black as charcoal-burners. It was impossible to keep clean. Ash flew off the ground at every step; every branch one grazed left a black streak and everything one touched was sooty. In the end only our eyes and teeth were reasonably white. The pungent smoke made eyes, nose and every scratch in the skin smart.

To compensate for the soot there were no flies or mosquitoes. The smoke kept them away and their breeding places had been destroyed. And the rocks were easy to examine. Except for sand and clay, no overburden hid them.

The days passed quickly and we covered our territory in two weeks. When Mike arrived in his little yellow plane, we were ready to move. He laughed heartily at our black faces and torn clothes. When he had taken our samples and my report he promised to send the transport plane to move us in a day or two. It arrived, we stowed everything aboard, tied the canoe to the struts and flew on to the next place.

This time we camped in green bush. The point on which we pitched our tent was dotted with spruce, gnarled and twisted by wind and snow, and along the shore there was a fringe of alders. The hills beyond were covered with thick undergrowth of birch and poplar. Even here fire had destroyed the timber some twenty or thirty years previously. An occasional dead dry spruce poked its javelin top over the verdure and scattered clumps of jackpine on the ridges stood silhouetted against the clouds.

There were also flies and mosquitoes. Especially mosquitoes. They were not really bad the first days; it was perhaps a little early for them. But when we had been there a week they made life plain hell. As soon as we poked our noses through the tent door the advance guard of a few thousand mosquitoes, which had stood watch all night, pounced, calling wildly for reinforcements. These were not long in coming, and, being rested, attacked with vim and vigour. Flailing wildly, cursing and wishing for two or three pairs of additional hands for swatting, we made for the fireplace to start breakfast.

When we had our fire going and threw some moss and punky wood on to it for smoke the timid ones retreated a little and gave

us a chance to cut the bacon and put on the coffee-pot. But as soon as one ventured away from the smudge they would attack again.

There was a continuous cloud of them around us and squadrons of them made repeated dives against the fire. In a few moments the bacon in the frying pan was mottled with hundreds of black dots, flies that had perished. In the coffee-pot floated a layer that covered the whole surface. A basin with soapy water would in a few minutes be coated with drowned mosquitoes. When the wind became strong they would retreat in eddies behind the tent, tree trunks and large rocks.

There was no use trying to eat outside. When breakfast was ready Paul would grab the coffee and sugar, I the frying pan and cups, and together we would dash into the tent, close the flaps and, after killing with the flit gun the hundreds that had sneaked in behind us, we could finally eat our meal in comparative peace.

In the bush it was equally bad. In spite of various derivatives of citronella oil and oil of tar that were only a moral support at best, the pests kept crawling into eyes, mouth, ears and nostrils. They crawled inside our shirt collars, up our sleeves, and bombarded our faces. Although they did not light and bite—the fly oil helped that much—they kept on hitting our faces and bouncing off, until our skins were as tender as after an all-day sand-storm. Also, when I had walked a few miles and perspiration began to run down my face, the fly oil ran with it into my eyes and mouth, making them smart and ache.

I remember especially one cloudy but stifling calm day. Paul and I went out together to look at an interesting formation that he had found the day before. When we were across the lake he noticed that he had forgotten his fly oil. But I had mine and we continued.

The mosquitoes were rising out of the moss in clouds at every step and attacked us continuously in such numbers that I got into a panicky, oppressive mood and had to steel myself against the involuntary urge to bolt right back for the tent. Every half-hour or so we anointed ourselves with dope. After one such stop, we found when we stopped again that we had left the bottle on some rock. On a common impulse, Paul and I turned and ran as

fast as our legs would carry us to the canoe and paddled back to the tent. Once there Paul stuck his hand out through the flap. I watched. At once it was completely covered with mosquitoes; there was not even standing room left. We went out no more that day.

That night I lay awake in bed for a long time, listening to the unending organlike hum made by myriads of insects, and the rattle, like that of driving rain, as they kept hitting the canvas. It was fearsome.

When the plane arrived, we were very happy to leave. The shore where we had camped was shallow, and to get the plane out, clear of rocks, so that it could take off, we stood on the pontoons and paddled away from the shore, perhaps fifty feet. The pilot gave us the clear sign and I dived into the seat beside him and closed the door. When I wiped the back of my neck, where I felt some mosquitoes biting, my hand came away covered with blood!

That was of course the worst plague of flies I have ever seen in my years in the North. Until then I had not believed some of the stories I had heard about them, regarding them as the exaggerations of people who were unfamiliar with bush-life and wanted to dramatize their hardships. But now I can well believe the stories of men who have gone mad from mosquitoes and black-flies, and of people who have been near death from their poisonous stings.

In fact, they are very seldom that bad and then only for short periods. And today, with DDT spray and vastly improved fly oils, like dimethyl phthallate, one can be comfortable even when the flies *are* bad.

So the season passed. The mosquito season was quickly over with the midsummer heat and toward the end of July we hardly needed dope for the few that remained.

We had been camped on the sandy shore of a large clear lake, dotted with islands on which grew bushy birch and dark-green spruce. Our camp site was a smooth sandflat supporting stately slim jackpine and occasional giant spruce. It was a very beautiful spot, but before we left we were thoroughly sick of it.

For the day when Mike was to visit us came and went. Then another day and another. To pass the time while we waited we

prospected the neighbouring hills, which we had already looked over, until they were perhaps the best explored in Canada. We had strict orders not to be more than half an hour's walk from the camp when and if a plane did arrive.

We had to find other diversions. We read all the magazines in camp from cover to cover. I read some of the stories twice. The sun was hot and I moved around with the shade of the big spruce before the tent until I had worn a bare spot in the lichen around it. Five days. Six. Still no Mike.

Paul took to watching the ants in a nearby hill. By the hour he would squat on his haunches and stare at them, sometimes getting up to catch a fly or beetle and throw it to the ants and watch them tear it into small bits. Or else he would stir the nest a little with a stick and enjoy the commotion it caused. 'Gee whiz,' he would holler to me. 'Don't it beat Paul Bunyan! They're just like people!' I grunted.

Along came a porcupine. It provided Paul with half a day's fun. He chased it up a tree with a long stick, and then he tried to lasso it. He finally succeeded in yanking it from the limb to which it clung. The poor porky finally sought shelter in the lake. It swam out while Paul was still throwing his rope at it. 'Now have you ever seen a porcupine swim before?' No, I said, I hadn't. It crawled ashore on a nearby point and disappeared in a cleft where Paul could not reach it. He went back to watching his ants.

Over a week had gone by. The sun continued hot, the weather calm.

Now we were getting worried. Had Mike maybe forgotten all about us? Our food supply was also getting very low. Besides bannock and tea and spices, we were out of everything but wieners, sauerkraut, and pork and beans. And we had little of those. The fish in the lake were all wormy. We would eat them only to save ourselves from starving. Except for a few spruce partridge, we had seen no game.

Paul left his ants and ambled over.

'Isn't this the life though? What are you looking so grumpy about? I know hundreds of rich tourists who would give a fortune—fifty or a hundred dollars a day—for a chance to be here.'

Unlimited opportunities for camping, fishing, hunting—not that they'd get much—canoeing, swimming, motorboating and nature study. You can study wild life in its unspoiled natural habitat. Every day a picnic in fresh, invigorating air. What, no likeee?

I grunted. 'So funny! Wonderful opportunity! Goddamn Mike!'

'And what would you like for supper, sir? Frankfurters and sauerkraut? Doctors claim that sauerkraut juice is among the healthiest things you can drink. Or perhaps wieners and delicious pork and beans? Or freshly caught northern whitefish?'

'You've missed your calling, you should be running an advertising agency. Quit clowning! I'm just about out of tobacco!'

That helped. Paul started opening cans.

After supper—wieners and beans for a change—we lay back on our bunks for a rest. Then I got up and went out to do the dishes.

Less than fifteen feet away, staring me straight in the face, stood a huge black bear, just getting set to raid our almost empty grub box. I whirled and made a headlong dive for the rifle in the back of the tent. Paul, rudely awakened from a contented half-slumber, scrambled up and became tangled up in my legs. 'Hey, what's the idea! You gone nuts?'

Without replying I dashed back out, Paul right behind. Bruin had retreated perhaps ten feet. He regarded us with a puzzled expression, maybe surprised at the sudden commotion. Paul made a grab for the rifle and lifted it to his shoulder.

'For chrissake! Don't shoot! Are you crazy? With a single-shot twenty-two!' I yelled, and took hold of the gun. Paul let go. 'Quick, get me some more shells. On top of my packsack.' He vanished, came back and put a handful in my palm. Bruin still had not moved, but I felt much better. Then slowly the bear turned and walked away. When he was a little way off he started circling. He was not going to leave just yet.

We dashed for the canoe. When we were out on the water some fifty feet from shore, we stopped. From here it was safe to plug Bruin. I waited until I had a good clear shot at him, whispered:

'Hold steady,' and fired, loaded and fired again. Both bullets hit with a hollow thud. But before I had time to load again, the bear was off.

We paddled ashore and followed. There was little blood to begin with, then more, and then we saw him, lying beside a log in the Labrador tea. Softly we stepped closer. The bear lifted his head and turned it to the side. I had a good, clear view of his left ear. He was only fifty feet away. I aimed just behind the ear and shot, and, without looking, loaded again quickly.

When I looked up again Bruin had slumped. He looked quite dead, but pressing the muzzle to his head I pulled the trigger once more. Then we skinned him and carried the hind quarters to camp. Now we did not care when Mike came. We had meat.

'Holy smokes,' said Paul. 'First you won't let me shoot. And then you start after a wounded bear with a twenty-two! Who's crazy around this joint?'

'Didn't see you hang back much,' I replied. 'Besides, he was pretty badly wounded. Look at all the blood. Too busy with his own troubles to notice what was going on.'

Next day we roasted bear meat for lunch. We were just starting on the first slice when we heard a hum. We looked up. There was the plane only a mile away. We never finished our lunch. Instead we started packing.

The plane was the Fairchild transport. The pilot had a note from Mike. He was too busy in a new gold area, just discovered. In the note he told us that we were to come there at once.

We landed at a new tent camp, near where some other company prospectors had made a find. No outsider knew about it yet and Mike wanted the whole surrounding area searched before news of the strike leaked out. He showed us a map, explained the setup, and away we went.

We found nothing of interest and moved on to another spot which we again left after two or three weeks. September came with bitter northeasters, which sometimes brought rain and sleet. But between these storms we had some wonderfully clear days, when the landscape with its yellow birches and russet aspen could be seen in detail for miles. The air was crystal, and sharp.

By short hops we had moved further and further northeast and were now in a land of stunted trees with occasional open fields between, near the timberline.

One beautiful fall day I was wandering over one ridge of hills after another, when I found myself at the brink of a sheer hundred-foot drop. The cliff formed a great fault which cut the formations and could be followed both ways for miles.

I became excited. Just here was one of those places where the crust once during primeval times had been rent and given the hot magma and mineral solutions a chance to approach the surface. This had to be investigated.

Below the cliff lay a shear-zone where the bedrock had been squeezed and ground into fragments, and again cemented together by quartz solutions from below to a breccia. Like a hound on a fresh track I rushed back and forth on a zig-zag course, following the shear. But my excitement soon died; although I knocked off samples galore, I did not find a speck of rust or sulphides or any other sign of valuable minerals. After a couple of hours' fruitless search I chose a few representative samples and continued on my original course.

A couple of miles farther on, as I walked over a flat outcrop, my eye was caught by its appearance. It looked so uncommonly smooth and hard. I knocked loose a fragment. It was quartz—dark smoky-grey quartz. I stopped. A vein, about ten feet wide in that spot, cut across the formation at an angle. It seemed roughly parallel with the shear behind me, and the bedrock on both sides was also sheared. Following the wall of the vein I found samples containing arseno-pyrite. I knocked and went on and knocked some more. Then suddenly a grain of free gold shone dully in a fresh fracture.

I stared and stared. A cold shiver leapt along my back and I felt inwardly as if I had been lifted suddenly from the ground. It was an exquisite moment. Then I had an almost overpowering urge to yell, jump and run straight home to show the rock to Paul. I looked around me almost expecting to see him there. But of course he was not there; he was miles away. I took a deep breath and tried to gather my senscs. 'You've found gold before, and nothing

came of it. This is nothing to go nuts about,' a voice said. But I would not believe it—I felt in my bones that this was it, the FIND!

Now I started searching frenetically, ran back and forth from spot to spot, pounded and pried. If I did not find minerals in every piece I was discouraged, and when I was in one end of the vein I wanted to run to the other. And when I did not find more gold I became downhearted again; the one I had found was just a fluke, there was no more. My mood changed between deepest despair and greatest joy; I was a complete idiot.

Then I took hold of myself. This would not do. I began working systematically. The quartz vein had the form of a fish, was about three hundred feet long and twenty-five wide at its widest spot and narrowed down to a long tail. Here most of the minerals were concentrated and here I also found more free gold. The vein lay in a small shear, smaller but parallel to the one at the bottom of the cliff. I followed it for some distance, but found no more quartz veins.

Loaded with samples I walked home to the tent. It was late, but I would have stayed at the find still later if daylight had not waned. As I neared camp I was hurrying, practically running, anxious to tell Paul about the find and show him my samples. When I did not find him at the tent, I was impatient and angry, although I knew that he was making a long traverse and that he would be late if he did what he had set out to.

There was gaiety and great hope in the camp the next few days. We poked around in the whole vicinity for more quartz veins, followed the shear zones for miles, and every evening we dragged home great loads of rocks. When Mike arrived a few days later, he took a long look at our eager faces and the big pile of sample bags on the shore and said: 'Well, I guess you've found something, eh?' We nodded in unison and started proffering samples.

A few days later the work was in progress. The plane brought more men and drills, dynamite, tents and supplies, and soon the hills echoed to the rhythmic beat of hammers on steel and a series of explosions. We were blasting trenches fifty feet apart across the vein and blowing gold and minerals out of their hiding place.

The results were good. In the narrow part of the vein gold values ran over one ounce in gold and along one wall of the wide part they were almost as good. The gold extended a few inches into the wall rock also. The discovery looked good. Paul and I were on the top of the world.

Then came the blow. In the deeper trenches the vein started fading out at depth. Soon it became apparent in all of them. The narrow, high-grade part petered out in country rock, and in the widest part, where an X-ray drill was put down at a 45-degree angle, it found no quartz and no values. Another hole confirmed it. The quartz body was boat-shaped also at depth. Below it the rocks were as 'hungry' as for miles around. And though we searched the vicinity for miles around for another we did not find one iota of gold-bearing quartz. Our vein was one of those flukes that so many other gold seekers in the district had encountered. It was isolated. The 'Goldfish' mine died.

So ended the season. On the smaller lakes the ice was already solid. The shallow bays of the one on which we were camped were ice-covered and on the ground there was a thin blanket of snow. Ptarmigans and snow-birds had arrived from the north. Winter was at the door when we boarded the plane and steered away from the spot of our dashed hopes.

CHAPTER XVII

IT is spring again. Paul and I are again headed north. Through the cabin window I look at the landscape which glides away under us. I see the snowless ice, leaden and dull on the large lakes, alternate with the glittering panes of the small ones that are already reflecting the sunlight like mirrors, framed in fresh greenery. I remember our talk with Mike a few hours ago.

'Now you'll have a chance to try your hand at a brand-new field. It has never been geologized, and we know practically nothing about it yet. But several Indians and trappers have shown us nice samples of various minerals from those parts, and for a long time there have been stubborn rumours about showings there. There might be anything there; but, as you know, it's only precious metals that'll pay so far away.'

He showed us the area on a map. It was situated far out on the tundra, beyond the timberline, northeast of Great Slave Lake.

We nodded and said that we understood what it was about, and Mike continued: 'As I already said, there are no geological maps of the area, not even decent topographic ones. But from the few data available we can conclude that the geology, at least in part, is similar to that of the Yellowknife district. But you'll soon see for yourselves.'

'This is in the nature of a reconnaissance trip. If you find some parts uninteresting, don't waste your time there, but move on until you find something that looks more promising. You understand we can't visit you often out there. You'll be on your own. Take along enough provisions for at least two months. And be careful. In about two months we'll meet here. If you aren't here but have been, leave a plain marker that I can see from the air and a detailed description of where you will be. Else I'll head

northeast along the water course to look for you. O.K.—Good! Take care of yourselves meanwhile. See you in two months.'

The land becomes more barren. The bush is beginning to disappear, first from the muskegs and high hills, then from the northerly slopes of the knolls, creeping gradually further down into the valleys, where it hides from the north wind. After having formed only narrow borders and patches along the lake shores, rivers and creeks, it disappears almost entirely. Only here and there in favourable locations stands a grove of stunted spruce and tamarack. We have left the bush: we are on the tundra. Only the smallest lakes are open. In narrows and along the shores of the larger ones there is a band of open water. The aircraft hums steadily on.

I look at Paul, who also is silent and watches the land with unseeing eyes. He is engrossed in his own thoughts. They are probably far away in Edmonton. Paul is now a married man and must find this first separation from his bride hard, especially as it will last six months.

'Buck up, she won't forget you before fall,' I say. Paul looks up and grins. 'No, I'm sure of that,' he declares with conviction. 'But it'd sure be nice to be able to pay her a visit after a couple of months.'

The pilot signs to us that we have arrived. With him we compare the map with the lake below; the likeness is only superficial, but we decide it must be the one. There is a long stretch of open water between it and the next lake, where the current has worn away the ice. In any case it is the only place for miles around where we can land, and after circling it a few times in search of submerged shoals, we go down. We take water and land at a rocky point worn smooth by glaciers and streams. The outfit is unloaded. The plane leaves. We are alone for two months.

During that time we shall follow a long water course of lakes and rivers by canoe, scanning the formations on both sides all the way to our rendezvous with Mike. Looking at the ice, thick and unbroken, I make a mental reservation that it had better break up soon or we will be a long way from the appointed spot when the time comes.

Neither of us has been on the tundra before. It is a new experience for both of us. At first glance we find that our conception of it must be considerably altered. And during the next weeks we discover a new, and for us so far unsuspected, world. The tundra is not at all the barren, lifeless and forbidden desert plain we have imagined.

First and foremost it is not a plain. We find the land as hilly and undulating as the wooded areas further south. Hills, knolls and swamps alternate with sand plains, rock-heaps and stone acres, and among these lie innumerable lakes and ponds. Dominating the landscape, high sand eskers run their sinuous course over hills and muskegs, creeks and lakes, leaving only narrow gaps where some river has gnawed its way through toward the sea. These eskers were formed long ago by rivers running under the great sheet of the melting glacier that covered the land until just a few thousand years ago.

Least of all is the tundra lifeless. Not in spring and summer at any rate. Now it seethes with life. Only the tops of the highest eskers and hills are bare; elsewhere the ground is covered by plants and bushes; thickets of dwarf birch and briar alternate with willows and plants of all kinds, many of which are familiar from southerly regions. What they lack in size they make up for in flowers. They develop an abundance of blossoms that we have never seen before. The more we look the more we are surprised. Locally the hillsides are covered with prairie crocus, ledum, Labrador tea, cloudberry and ranunculus that compete with each other, clothing the hills with cloaks of colour and filling the air with scent. The swamps are white with waving arctic cotton.

The animal kingdom is as rich and varied. Insects of all descriptions hum and crawl around us or fly from flower to flower. When we walk over the fells, nesting birds fly up from shrubs and tufts of grass, and in even the smallest ponds are quacking water fowl. Ptarmigans waddle unafraid before us; songbirds keep up a continuous chant. From the top of a hill we see a herd of foraging caribou and often on our wanderings the acrid smell of wolf, fox and wolverine tells of a den in the vicinity. Weasels play in the rock-heaps, poke their heads quickly out of some hole, disappear,

then appear a second after in a new place. Falcons and hawks nest on narrow ledges on the cliffs.

One day Paul points to the sky. Up there, endlessly high, hovers a great bird on extended motionless wings. It is an eagle, spying with sharp eyes for a careless newborn caribou fawn, an arctic hare or perhaps a white fox pup. When he discovers a prey he folds his wings and falls like a stone upon his victim, snuffing out its life with long knife-sharp talons.

The lakes are also full of life. In our net we catch large whitefish, grayling and trout, and at the shore a surprised pike suddenly splashes as it flashes for deep water and safety with the speed of an arrow.

The summer is short on the tundra, but fiery and intensive. Nature must hurry to complete its life cycle, to bloom and bear fruit, love and multiply in a few short months. But the summer smiles more tenderly on the tundra than on the south; the sky is higher and day lasts around the clock. There is no time to sleep; winter is the time for that.

The tundra winter is icy and frightful. Then the wind sweeps over the land, whining and unhampered for days on end, driving every shivering living thing into its burrow, piling snow into ten-foot drifts in the hollows and clearing the tops of eskers and hills and howling hollowly around cliffs and boulders. Then King Bore is really king.

Our arrival has been well timed. Within barely ten days, when we have finished looking over the surroundings of our first camp, the ice breaks up in our lake and we are free to travel on. Subsequently we move perhaps ten miles at a time and camp and wander out over the hills, prospecting. Slowly we proceed along the great waterway southwestward. Several of the lakes are miles-wide expanses of open blue, separated only by rapids, narrows or short stumps of river.

Paul was often in a melancholy mood. He thought of his wife in Edmonton. But I had a problem also. I had quit smoking by the simple expedient of not taking any tobacco along when we left the fort. It was a drastic but effective method. Once out in the

wilderness I could not get any tobacco for months, and by then I would be cured.

Although I suffered all the pangs of hell during the first weeks, Paul maintained that he was at least as sorely tired, because my mood was execrable. Paul said afterwards that I had been like a bear with a sore paw, forever grumbling. But after two weeks the worst was over; the hoise-cure had worked. I did not smoke for over a year afterwards, not until in a weak moment I accepted a cigarette that was offered me and later one more. And that was it. Next day I smoked like a stack. All Paul's and my own suffering had been for nothing.

On one of my traverses I came upon an oasis. I had struggled up a rise and stood on the crest catching my breath. Spread out before me was a kettle-shaped wooded valley, with a lake in its centre. I had happened on one of those timber bluffs which one can quite unexpectedly encounter in some sheltered place, sometimes far north of the actual tree line. These are much sought after by trappers, who establish their headquarters there for the winter. They are usually anxious to lay claim on all of them in a given territory, and to keep their existence secret from others as long as possible. Art Englund had one like that near Dubawnt Lake. Only a couple of his friends had seen it; they maintained that it was one of the nicest places they had ever visited.

I went down into the valley. Had some trapper perhaps already found the bluff and built a cabin there? On the slope I first met some gnarled black spruce, which crept timidly along the ground and which, as if afraid of their own boldness in venturing so far up, spread their branches along the ground seeking support. A little further down they dared to stand up, although they were short and stocky, with trunks like carrots, thick at the butt and tapering to a thin stick in a few feet. They were covered with so many branches that one could hardly reach the bole between them. Further down on the slope the trees were braver, and on the valley bottom they grew straight and tall, interspersed with larch at the lake shore. On the sand flat in the east end of the valley the white spruce stood symmetrical as in a park, the ground between covered with brittle light-grey lichen.

Enjoying the sight, I wandered through the growth and came to the lake shore. There I eagerly looked for some sign of humans. I discovered an open space and there found a grey cabin in a clearing. I hailed but got no answer, at the moment the cabin was uninhabited—but only temporarily, for on the walls hung ropes and dog chains and on the shelves were cooking pots and pans, an assortment of dishes and tools, and in a corner were traps and stretchers for furs. On the door of the 'cache', which stood high above the ground on four poles, was a rusty padlock. I burst into a laugh. A padlock against marauding bears or wolverines! No one else could conceivably be expected to visit the valley.

In the log cabin there were no clues to the identity of its owner. A couple of magazines dated the summer before mutely testified that it had been occupied the preceding winter. The trapper had probably already left by dog team in April. His canoe was still on the shore, showing that he had departed before break-up.

On a leaf torn from my notebook I scribbled a greeting, left it on the table weighed down with a rock, and continued on my way.

In the same vicinity I came upon a couple more bluffs, or rather remnants of some, because every tree was dead and rotten, lying half-covered by moss, decaying on the ground. No fire had destroyed them and only a few stumps had been cut by axe. Seemingly without rhyme or reason, they had withered away and no young trees had taken their places. What had killed them? Cold or disease?

The water-course we followed consisted largely of lakes. They were often separated only by a fall or rapid. The shores below a fall were littered with the bleached bones and skulls of scores of caribou. What disaster had overtaken the animals here? Had some kill-crazy native slaughtered them? But why the scattered bones? A hunter would have used the meat, he would not have left it to foxes and ravens. The bones showed no mark of bullet, axe, or knife.

Then the answer came to me. The caribou had drowned. During some migration the herds had either tried to swim across above the falls or else crossed in a mass on thin ice which had given

way. In either case the strong current had swept them over the falls, drowning hundreds, perhaps thousands, because only a fraction of their number would have been washed ashore at the bottom. The rest had been carried out into the lake. Beasts and birds had feasted on the carcasses and spread the bones around.

Such tragedies are not uncommon. Some winters one finds countless caribou drowned and frozen to the ice in northern lakes. Especially during their fall migration caribou will venture out on very thin ice, where they break through and are unable or too tired to break ice to the shore. So they perish.

We were approaching the bush country again. Isolated bluffs of spruce appeared on the shores, willows and alder became more plentiful and larger. Some caribou carried good-sized white spruce on their flanks. Evidence of other humans also appeared; cut tree stumps and old camp sites. We were nearing age-old travel routes.

Then we came upon something that looked like the model of a futuristic city. Parallel sets of fractures, crossing each other at right angles, cut the bedrock. Frost had then heaved up the blocks until cubes and rectangular slabs protruded sometimes ten feet above the surface, looking like churches, monuments, office buildings or the United Nations headquarters; a modern architect's pipe dream of a metropolis.

One night Paul came home late, panting and red in the face. He opened his packsack and dumped a huge rock sample on the ground. It gleamed in the sun. The whole rock was made up of sulphides; cubes of pyrite, pyrrhotite and streaks of chalcopyrite. Between the crystals were only a few grains of quartz. Paul looked at me proudly.

"There's oodles of it," he asserted. "I followed a fifteen-foot vein for several hundred feet. Some of it is massive. It sure looks pretty."

The next day we were at the spot early. I found that Paul had not exaggerated. The bedrock, a fine hard quartzite, was fractured and shot full of disseminated sulphides; criss-crossing it were veins, up to six inches wide, consisting of massive stuff with streaks of pure chalcopyrite. Among these were at least four large lenses of

the same. We pried out chunks of pure sulphides as big as cabbages. The ground was rusty for acres around.

All day we ran up and down the veins, knocked out samples and squinted through our glasses. No gold. Then we began panning. We had nothing to roast the samples on; our primus stove would not suffice. Besides, we had to husband our coal oil. So we crushed and ground the rocks and panned them as they were. Our excitement waned. The 'tails' contained only an occasional small 'colour'. Unless the gold and other precious metals that the rock might contain were so minutely bound up with the sulphides that they could not be separated by panning, the deposit was valueless.

There it glittered in the sun like a new Golconda, but of no avail to anybody. The copper content alone did not make it ore. We were too far from civilization. It would not pay to mine even if it were pure chalcopyrite, even if it were pure copper. The transportation costs would exceed even the price of pure copper.

In the same area we encountered further similar concentrations, but no sign of gold or silverbearing quartz veins. For a week we searched the area. Then we had to leave. Time was getting short; we had to hurry if we wanted to reach our meeting place in time, and still have time to glance at the formations along the route.

We took some samples, marked the occurrences on our map and went on. Subsequent assays gave small values in gold and silver, but not enough of anything to make the deposits mincable. There was just enough copper to make them interesting if they were one thousand miles further south near the railways. .

We reached our meeting place in time, a prominent point in a large lake. There we camped and sat down to wait. But the days went by and no Mike. When three days had gone by, we became really worried. Had we or perhaps Mike made a mistake about the lake, or about the time? Or had he lost his map or perhaps forgotten all about us? We were in the same predicament as the summer before. Only this time we could not afford to wait too long. Our food supply was getting very low. If nobody came and we had to get out on our own, we had barely enough to make the nearest fort, Reliance, at the east end of Great Slave Lake, and

then only if we travelled fast. There was nothing to spare for emergencies or delays.

When five days had passed, we could wait no longer. Spreading on the ground a marker of white cloth with a red square at its centre, we put a map with our proposed course in a tin can on top and shoved off.

Now we travelled at top speed, stopping only to eat and sleep, paddling for twelve or fourteen hours a day. We had luck with the weather; no storms held us up on the large lakes we had to cross, and every night we compared the stretch we had covered with what remained. We divided the food up into daily rations so that it would last. It would be touch and go.

We were scooting down wind over a large lake at full clip, with a canvas up for a square sail, when there was a sudden loud roar over our heads. The company Fairchild, its yellow wings glinting, buzzed past fifty feet above, banked, circled and buzzed us again. We waved our paddles and shouted. The plane dipped its wings, made for the shore, landed and disappeared beyond a point. We hurried after it.

Never had I seen a more welcome sight. Suddenly I was very hungry. If it had not been for our urgency to reach the plane, I would have stopped paddling right there and dug out a day's ration and devoured it on the spot.

The plane was tied up and the pilot standing on the shore when we rounded the point. He waved and hailed.

'Hello, fellows. How's tricks? Getting low on grub, eh? Well, I got lots here for you—and mail too. Yes, I know Mike was supposed to meet you over a week ago, but he had to go on a trip. He just wired us yesterday that he couldn't get back and told us to go instead.'

We glanced through our mail. There was a wire for Paul. It was laconic. 'Come home. Jane very ill. Love. Mother.' It was over a week old.

'You'd better go,' I said in reply to Paul's worried glance.

'But how'll you get along alone?'

'Fine, of course. I'm no cheechako!'

'Sure, but I think you should come along, back to Yellowknife,

Erik,' the pilot interrupted. 'You know it's against the principles of the company to leave a man alone in the field.'

'Principles go hang! I've lived alone in the bush for months at a time. Don't worry. Just take Paul with you. Then if Mike wants to, he can send somebody else here till Paul returns. Besides, I've got the radio; it talks almost as much as Paul,' I concluded and ducked my head as a fist whizzed past my ear.

'Well, 'bye then. I won't be away long,' said Paul and tried to smile. We shook hands and he climbed into the cabin. A wave, a glimpse of a worried face, and they were gone.

Mike obviously thought that I could get along alone all right, because he sent nobody to replace Paul. Or else he was still too busy to think about it. When we met some weeks later at a previously arranged place, he said only:

'So you haven't gone nuts yet, or started talking to yourself. How are things going?' He climbed out of the cockpit.

When he had looked over my samples and received my report, he said slowly: 'I'm sorry I wasn't able to visit you before, but then I've been pretty busy. I've been down in the new field at Lac la Ronge. How would you like to go there?'

'Just fine! I know the place. I've been there before. And this is pretty darn dull.'

'Excellent! Hold yourself in readiness then, in case we should decide to send you there instead,' Mike admonished as he clambered back in the plane. 'Goodbye for now. See you soon.'

He did not say a word about a new partner to replace Paul. I was still alone.

A few days later the transport plane arrived again. 'Pack up, Erik. You are going to Lac la Ronge.'

Half an hour later we were on our way back to the area, almost a thousand miles south, where I first saw a glimpse of the Northland and received my first taste of bush life.

CHAPTER XVIII

SO I was again in the Lac la Ronge area. I had to laugh to myself, when I remembered how wild, deserted and arctic I had considered it when I first came there. Why, there were people everywhere! The lake shore was dotted with cabins, lots of people even had horses and fields and gardens. In a little more than an hour, and for just a few dollars, they could fly to Prince Albert. The place was practically crowded.

The area had changed, of course, and improved enormously since then. The village itself, which had consisted of a mission, a couple of stores and a handful of cabins and warehouses, had become a regular tourist resort. One could now go outside by car on a new, fine highway. People were building summer cabins.

There, too, gold was now the main topic of conversation. The same spectacle which I had seen once in Beaverlodge was being re-enacted. Near every cabin there were piles of rock samples and the whole population had suddenly become a collection of experts on geology who, with grave expressions, discussed the most fantastic theories.

When I had spent a few days at the various properties in the new field, to acquaint myself with the formations and the way the gold occurred, I was out in the bush again. I went to a place where the geology, according to the map, was supposed to be similar to that of the Lac la Ronge field, and where Mike thought that gold might occur under similar conditions.

But the maps were wrong. There were no unaltered volcanics, only narrow bands of schist, the product of severe alteration, alternated with gneisses of various kinds and slaty iron formation. The quartz veins were few and poorly mineralized. I did not get

even a smell of gold in all the handfuls of pulverized material I washed. There were few signs of faulting and shearing.

To get away from this uninteresting district as soon as possible and on to more favourable ground, I worked rapidly, making long traverses and moving camp often. I wanted to get down to Churchill River and on to the nearest fort. From there I could send a wire to Mike that the volcanics were a myth.

Then I suddenly became ill; for the first time since my childhood, violently ill. I was seized by acute pain in the abdomen, cramps and severe vomiting. I could hardly move a step. For three days I lay in the tent and writhed. Every movement was a pain, every breath a gasp.

I wondered how I could get help or send word. Before I went in it had been agreed that nobody would visit me, but that after the work was finished I would travel to the Hudson's Bay post at Souris River and wire Mike from there. Thus I could not expect any assistance without going for it myself.

To allay my anxiety and lead my thought in other channels, I let the radio play constantly. I still recall certain popular hits, which I cannot hear without remembering my tent on the shore of the calm wilderness lake. The sun is sinking, a loon laughs and the mosquitoes hum. But above all this . . . 'White sails beside a blue lagoon . . .', '... my love and youuuuu . . .', or 'Si, si, si, hear my penny serenade'. I groaned, when for the umptieth time I heard America's swooniest crooner drag out his love in various dulcet pitches, form the word in his mouth to a sweet morsel, which he chewed on and licked and never seemed to be able to swallow. But still he was better company than none at all.

From the symptoms I had concluded that my appendix was making trouble, something that one always believes in such cases, even when it is only colic. But at any rate I ate nothing; instead I drank all the olive oil I had and that helped. Soon I was much better, and a few days later I was again able to walk around. Occasionally I still had lesser attacks, but now I could at least seek help.

Some twenty miles away there was, according to the maps, an Indian village. To this led a portage trail over three small lakes

and down a tributary of the Churchill River. It was plainly marked on the map.

I left my tent and outfit behind and paddled across the lake. There were black bears in the vicinity, but I had to take the risk of their raiding my stores. The canoe was all I could carry.

After a long search I finally found the first portage. It was, of course, inaccurately marked on the map and therefore hard to find for anyone unfamiliar with the place. However, once I was on the right trail the others were well blazed and easy to find. Only the last one, which was more than a mile long and led through burnt-over land, was hard to follow. I got over that one, though, at last and sighed with relief when I put my canoe in the little river which led to the Indian village, and paddled slowly down the stream.

It was late evening when the village came into sight. I hoisted a tarpaulin for a sail and coasted the last stretch with the wind. Yes, it was inhabited, there were people moving around on the shore. Relieved, I settled back.

There were a score of people at the landing when I arrived. They greeted me hospitably, smiling and laughing. Most of them, especially the younger ones, spoke good English. When I had told them why I had come they asked me in at once and a couple of the younger men volunteered to go and fetch my equipment. I pointed out my camp site to them on the map, and at daybreak they were off. I stayed in the village to await their return.

During the two days I waited I became acquainted with all the families in the village and studied their life and customs.

These Indians were all Crees, and a different type from the Chipewyans with whom I was familiar farther north. They had their summer camp, or rather the village where they lived in the summertime, here at the river. Most of the cabins were well built and I saw to my surprise that they all had large gardens and potato patches. But they lacked cattle and sheep. This was because they were all trappers and fishermen during the winter months, when most of them moved far northward out into the bush. They were not true nomads except in the winter. The houses were

clean, the children's noses had been wiped and the squaws and men were neatly clad. All had food and good tools.

By the village the river expanded into a large lake, which was well stocked with fish. Here they caught many pike, pickerel, trout, and especially good large whitefish. The men told me that commercial fishing was getting under way in the larger lakes even there.

In their gardens they raised a full range of vegetables from onions to cabbages. Near the cabins grew berries and flowers. The older members of the village, who were unable to do harder work, puttered among the gardens. I suddenly realized that I would have to change my ideas about the future of the Indian. At least these Indians would not perish. They would assert themselves in the race with the white man. This conception grew the more I saw of them that summer. Both in appearance and manners they differed from the Chipewyans. Their features were more like those of 'real' Indians, with lean faces and hooked noses. They also lacked the somnolence which characterized the Chipewyans; there was an air of energy and willingness to work about them. Most had gone to school at least a few years. Perhaps it was their nature from the beginning. That may also have been the reason why during the past centuries they had crowded the Chipewyans farther and farther north to poorer hunting grounds. There was no doubt that the Crees were not taking things lying down.

Some months later I became acquainted with the Anglican minister and school principal in a nearby settlement. He was a full-blood Cree and one of the finest men I have met. He had admirably succeeded in combining the white man's knowledge and religion with the Indian way of life. He considered the education of adults as important as that of the children and showed his brethren the way. He had also, by setting an example and showing his kinsmen their faults and shortcomings, brought them a long way ahead.

His story is notable. He was the son of one of the local chiefs, and after passing through the mission school, had continued his studies at the university and at a seminary. In spite of a great faculty for

mechanics, he had decided that his vocation was to aid and educate his tribesmen. He had schooled himself for the ministry and for teaching, and had, after many years' work in other missions, at last returned to the place of his birth.

He was the ideal man for his work. Whenever necessary he could get into his canoe and without ceremony paddle to a christening or a deathbed. He needed neither a guide, paddlers nor other outward insignia of his station. Sometimes he went with the men of his flock on hunting trips, nor had he forgotten his inborn skill with axe and gun. At the same time he taught them many useful things, with obvious results.

His wife, a girl from his own tribe, was also a sympathetic person. An educated woman in her own right, she taught in the school, but was also a good housewife. She endeavoured especially to revive the Indians' old handicrafts and give them back their old honourable status.

They had succeeded in a happy way in uniting white and red concepts. Neither tried to hide their Indian origin, nor did they throw it in the face of their white visitors. They associated with them with complete naturalness as with civilized equals. They were refreshing acquaintances after the many alternately boasting and cringing half breeds that I had met. They were worthy teachers of their brethren.

I stayed with my Indian friends until the two men, who had gone for my outfit, returned, and even a few days longer. I was looked after in the best possible manner. As the attacks had ended and the pain had lessened considerably, I decided to continue my journey to the nearest trading post alone without help. One morning, after a friendly farewell, I left the village and paddled slowly up the river.

The mail plane was due at the post a few days after my arrival, and so I sent my report to Mike, without mentioning anything about my illness, and sat down to await developments. A week later Mike's little yellow craft hummed into sight and landed.

'Hello, prospector! How's tricks? You say that the greenstone's a bluff. Are you sure? Well, then you better come with me to Copper Lake and prospect a group of claims that we've just bought

down there. By the way, Paul won't be back this summer. He wrote me a letter. So now I can't leave you alone out in the bush any more anyway, or I'll catch proper hell myself.'

In the mail there was a letter from Paul to me too. It substantiated Mike's news. Paul's wife was still ailing, and to be near her he had taken a job in the city. He would perhaps return to the bush the following spring.

Thus I went to Copper Lake and, although I did not tell Mike, I was quite happy about it. To remain alone in the field did not appeal to me any more either.

About a dozen men worked at Copper Lake on a gold prospect which the company had recently optioned from its owner, who had found a small but rich showing on it. The gold there occurred in quartz veins traversing isolated bodies of diorite. These veins were mineralized with arsено-pyrite and graphite and crossed surrounding formations also, but only the parts that were in diorite carried gold in paying quantities.

My job was to prospect the claims one by one, to follow every vein, scour every outcrop, investigate every rusty rock I found. Always I had to remember that the ground had already been closely prospected and that most of its features were known. Thus it was to the less prominent, the hidden and obscure parts that I was to give special attention. Spending several days on each claim I searched systematically, going over each outcrop minutely, pacing distances and marking all I saw on a large-scale detailed map.

I had been working on the group some weeks when I at last made a find. Some thousand feet northwest of the original diggings was a low dirt-covered knoll with no outcrops showing. Digging into it here and there with a grub hoe I uncovered some dark, reddish-brown, rusty and weathered material. Going deeper there were some fragments of diorite and a piece of arsено-pyrite. With this I went to the camp and returned after lunch armed with pick, shovel and some powder. Additional digging and blasting uncovered a shear in diorite, laced with quartz veinlets and more arsено-pyrite. Finally there was a speck of free gold. Tying the little sliver of quartz in my handkerchief, I went home, happy.

There the geologist in charge showed me more. The piece of aiseno-pyrite I had brought at noon also contained gold. He had smoothed it with a file and rubbed it on a piece of frosted glass. On the smoothly polished surface there were two small shining specks.

The next morning the whole crew was digging and blasting trenches across the shear at two-hundred-foot intervals. They uncovered some additional parallel shears and veins over a length of more than six hundred feet. The find looked like a mine.

I was both happy and depressed. I had made what looked like a worthwhile find at last, but I would receive no financial benefit from it. Since the company already owned the property, I only got the 'glory' of being the discoverer. And that, I well knew, would soon be gone. It was an ironical climax to my efforts.

Thoughts like these were in my mind during the following weeks as I finished examining the claims and extended my search into the surroundings. Fall was coming, and the season would soon be ended. Would I be going outside for a much-needed holiday? It was now eight years since I had been outside, except for a few weeks a couple of times. Though I had been content in the bush I still felt that I had missed many things: the bright lights, shows, music and other amusements and especially female companionship of a type that was completely lacking in the North.

This time money was no problem. I had saved enough to spend a winter outside and accepted an offer for my lot in Goldfields' 'best residential section', where my ill-fated cabin had stood. There was a new house on it now; when I returned there I would only have to sign the deed and receive payment. Jack Shirley had invited me to come and stay with him until I got my bearings. Yes, it was time to go outside for a winter. I would accept Jack's invitation.

Musing and almost unobservant, I was wandering through the yellowing bush when something made me stop. Something about the trees and the plants and the general lay of the land seemed vaguely familiar. The spruce stood large and bushy and well spaced; ferns, herbs and leaves covered the ground, which sloped gently away from me.

Then it struck me—all this looked very much like the spot where I had made my find almost a month ago. The vegetation was similar and luxuriant and not like that of the barren, jackpine-covered quartzite hills which predominated in the area. Could this spot also be underlain by diorite? But no, this was well outside the narrow limited zone where diorite had been found. This was open ground, that nobody had bothered to stake for that very reason. But there might still be some diorite here; crazier things had happened. My interest quickened. I started scurrying back and forth, digging into the ground every few feet. But I just struck sand everywhere.

A knob protruded above the other ground. Bedrock might be closer there, I thought, and walked over. The grub-hoe struck rich dark-brown dirt. A foot down I struck an egg-shaped rock. I broke it. Diorite!

Going deeper I worked like a beaver, digging, scratching, prying. There were more rocks and finally bedrock. And the bedrock too was diorite! My hole was now more than two feet deep: I decided to blast. Taking out some dynamite, caps and fuse, that I had started carrying for just such an occasion, I wedged several sticks in the cracks among the rocks, attached cap and fuse, covered the whole with sand and lit the fuse.

Running for cover to a large tall spruce, I noticed in passing a white stone the size of a loaf of bread protruding from the dirt. After the blast had gone, throwing rocks, sand and dust in all directions I returned slowly, picked up the white rock—a chunk of quartz it was—and went on to the hole. There were several big blocks of diorite lying around now; some rusty and schistoid. But no mineralization.

I started pounding on the quartz boulder I had found. There were some specks of graphite in it and spots of rust where possibly some arsenic had leached out. Leaving the whole I hurried back to the spot where the quartz had lain. Digging, more excited than ever, I found more quartz and rusty dirt. This was better! I hardly gave myself time to dig the pit deep enough before I again loaded dynamite in the cracks and blasted.

There was quartz all over the hole and around it. And some of it

was mineralized! I saw a seam of pure arseno-pyrite, half an inch wide. This was it. Here must be gold! I swallowed hard in my excitement, as I studied each piece with my mineral glass. I could hardly believe my eyes when I did see what I was looking for: a dully gleaming mote, shaped like the branch of a tree or a twisted wire, protruding from the rock. I turned it in the light. No, it did not change colour or shade. Yes, it was gold! I sat down weakly.

Then came worry. This was open ground, I knew, but would it be considered my find or the company's? Would they claim that since they had brought me here and I had been exploring their claims, this would come in the same category? Or would they concede that this find was made under my prospecting contract, the contract I had been working under during the two past seasons, except for the short time spent on the Copper Lake claims?

Why surely, because since then I had been completely on my own, worked and come and gone as I pleased, even though I had lived in their camp. Besides, I was now miles away from the original 'gold belt'. This was an original discovery, and it would have to be treated as such. Relived and reassured, I tried to collect my wits and make a plan.

What was the best procedure now? Stake first and explore after was the logical answer. There were other outfits working in the area, other prospectors wandering in the bush.

When I went home in the increasing dusk, I had staked a claim on the find and hidden my samples and covered the pits I had blasted as well as I could. I would not re-open them or show any samples before I had staked eight more claims straddling the showing and its possible extension both ways along the strike. Then only would I disclose my discovery and send out samples for assay.

No one in the camp seemed to notice my eagerness to be off early, or that every night I returned in the dark too late for supper—except the cook. One night when I walked in for a sandwich and a cup of coffee, he said grumbly:

'Christ, Erik! One would almost think you'd found a mine the way you stay out till all hours. What're you paying board for? You ain't eating any.'

My heart almost missed a beat as the boys, who played poker at the table, laughed. But I smiled strainedly and said as steadily as I could:

'You bet, Les, a big one. I'll tell you all about it in a day or so!' And I got the laughs on my side when I added. 'She's ten feet wide, a mile long, open at both ends and full of gold all through!'

'I bet it is, too. Sit down and take a hand, Erik. We'll show these clodhoppers who can play stud!'

I spent a week staking the claims and prospecting along the strike of the find for additional showings, gloating over my samples and making extravagant plans. Now I *would* go outside for the winter. Perhaps even to Europe, even though war had broken out there. At any rate I would have a real fling.

The night I had finished staking my nine claims and had gathered up my best samples and come in to camp, Mike had just arrived. He greeted me with a wide grin:

'Hear you've been rambling around late every night. Got a squaw hidden in the bulrushes somewhere or finding mines? What's the mystery? Come clean.'

It was a delicious moment. I replied: 'A mine,' and laid a sample on the table. It had a large speck of free gold in it.

Mike squinted at it. 'Well, I'll be damned!'

When he inspected the showing the next day he laughed as he said:

'By God, you're pretty cute, aren't you, Erik. Sewing it all up tight before spitting out a word! But I think you've got something here.'

The following weeks were hectic. While part of the crew was staking around the new showing, I was given some men to help me open it up.

The quartz vein was persistent. When approaching winter made us stop the trenching work, it had been traced for some five hundred feet, and there were several drag-folds in it, which contained abundant free gold. Assays averaged well over one-quarter of an ounce per ton. It looked like a real showing.

The company seemed to think so too. When after the completed season I came to Goldfields a few weeks later, I received my

first down payment, with more to come later if the property proved up. I felt happy and successful as I left the mine office and went to town.

In Goldfields there was now an air of complacent permanency. Its future was assured, it seemed. Everybody had a steady job, business was good. It had come far from the roaring mining camp it had been only a few years earlier. Now it looked what it was, a small-town, with ordinary, everyday people. Gone were all the characters, the hardened prospectors, burly construction workers, loud-voiced stock promoters, gamey women and gamblers. Gone also were the parka-clad trappers and their dogs. The people I met on the board sidewalks in front of the neatly painted stores and restaurants acted and were dressed like those outside. The dogs that cocked their legs against the house corners were spaniels and terriers, there was hardly a husky in sight.

I noticed something else about the people too. They did not laugh as much as formerly, their faces were pinched and unsmiling. Civilization, with all its meanness, mediocrity, petty problems and small-town snobbery, had arrived. Hope had been exchanged for security. Goldfields was not for northerners any more. It was golden in its name only. It was not for me. When I had closed the deal on my building lot I went to the airways office to inquire about passage outside. A plane was to leave for Prince Albert the same afternoon and I booked a seat. Pete was there too. He was going away on the same trip, he too would spend the winter outside.

We had a few hours to while away before the plane was due to leave. After a stroll around the town we spent the rest of our time at the beer parlour, eagerly discussing our plans for the future, the war and how it would affect us. The war had made communications to Europe difficult. Pete also had been thinking of paying his ageing parents a visit but intended to leave the decision until he had seen what the future promised. I, too, was undecided; conditions could change overnight. We would know better when we had sized up the situation outside.

While we were sitting in lively discussion in the smoky, crowded room, some angry words suddenly cut through the

general hum and we looked up. 'Go on, beat it, you goddamn tramp!' a stocky miner yelled to a slight old man and pushed him away. The man recled back, a little unsteady on his feet. He turned and we recognized him. It was old Gus. In spite of the cold weather he was dressed only in a thin windbreaker, slacks and sandals. Protestingly, he said something about just one glass.

'No! Not a single glass more'll you get from me. You got a skinful last night! Now go on, beat it!' Somebody at the table laughed.

We hailed Gus. He came over and almost fell about our necks when he recognized us. Old friends were old friends still, he declared tearfully. His real old friends did not forget him even though he had had bad luck. They were different from all this trash that now lived in town.

When Pete and I left, Gus was sleeping peacefully in his bed. We had tucked him in there, when he had had the quantum of beer he could stand, and left an unopened bottle beside him for a hang-over cure when he awoke. Gus snored quietly, and old rheumatic Prince had crawled up in the foot-end of his bed, when we softly closed the door.

A while later our plane arrived. We stepped aboard and headed south.



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Malaurie, who planned this journey, was one of the last to know the Eskimos as they really were in this farthest human outpost—a lovable, childlike, generous people, one of the few that are still resisting assimilation. They call themselves *Inuit*, 'the men *par excellence*'. They have fortitude, ingenuity, brotherliness and philosophy, and this is how Malaurie shows them in his account of their life, legends, activities, beliefs, personal and social relations.

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NORMAN HARDIE

In 1955 Norman Hardie, fellow-countryman and climbing comrade of Sir Edmund Hilary, was one of those who stood at the summit of Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain of the world. This was the culminating triumph of his mountaineering career, but it was not until the mountain was descended that his private adventure began.

Parting from the expedition at the Base Camp, Hardie walked with his Sherpa companions across the high ranges and through the deep valleys of upper Nepal until they came to the Sherpa village of Khunimung. There he lived for many months in exactly the same conditions as the Sherpas themselves, sharing their food and homes, joining in their festivals and taking part in all their traditional activities. Later he was joined by his wife and they shared the Sherpa life together, while the author carried out a survey of the locality and settled some doubtful details in the maps.

Norman Hardie's account of their life with the Sherpas is colourful in the extreme, and no aspect of the life and traditions of this fascinating people is ignored, while his adventures in the high places that are still inadequately mapped have both excitement and novelty. The book is illustrated with the author's own photographs and his wife's.

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